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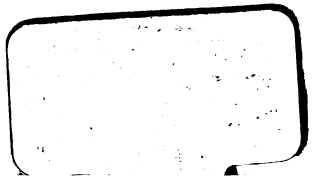

# A WOMAN'S GLORY.

BY

SARAH DOUDNEY,

AUTHOR OF

'STRANGERS YET,' ETC.

'Look up, there is a small bright cloud
Alone amid the skies,
So high, so pure, and so apart
A Woman's Glory lies.'

MRS. BROWNING.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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# A WOMAN'S GLORY.

## CHAPTER I.

### GOING AWAY.

MRS. COLLINGTON had taken a liking to the Torwoods, and Angeline was asked to stay at Verbena Lodge. Lilly Heatherstone had returned to Fairwood with her brother and his wife; and without any words it was quietly understood that the Torwood-Heatherstone alliance would never come to pass.

After the bustle of a fashionable watering-place, the sleepy calm of Seacastle was pleasant to Angeline. August had now come to an end; the early September days were dreamy and sweet; at evening there were golden mists veiling the low-lying fields and pebbled beach, and creeping up to the old castle walls. Bride Netterville was released from her room, and wandered about all day in the autumn sunshine. Cora and Angeline were her daily companions, and, in spite of Mrs. Goad, Eunice was now bold enough to join them.

The thought of her approaching emancipation had inspired her with new courage; and somehow Matilda (a little crushed, perhaps) was beginning to see that Eunice was throwing off her yoke. Anyhow, the girl had plucked up spirit, and ventured to join her friends, even when Captain Torwood was of the party.

'She was uncommonly nice to talk to.' That was Captain Torwood's opinion of Eunice Swift; and yet he saw clearly that she had never been trained in the world, and knew nothing of the conventional style of conversation.

The truth was that, in talking, Eunice forgot herself; all the small miseries of her life were put out of sight, and she became a free and happy soul. Captain Torwood was well satisfied to listen sometimes without speaking; and he could speak or hold his peace as he chose. She did not look for compliments or attentions. Anything untrammelled is amusing; and as Lawrence Torwood loved being amused, and dreaded nothing so much as a bore, the pair quickly glided into friendliness.

As they grew better acquainted, Eunice ceased to find resemblances between Captain Torwood and any of her beloved heroes of

fiction. This man of everyday life (by no means a remarkable fellow, if the truth must be told) was rapidly becoming more interesting than the Nigels and Peverils who had so long enchained her fancy.

It was, in fact, the first time that she had ever been brought into close contact with a man of the period. Captain Torwood, with his gentlemanly languor and quiet grace of manner, was a good type of the class to which he belonged, so far as externals went. As regarded the inner self, he was, on the whole, more liberally endowed with brains and heart than many of his associates. But neither brains nor heart had ever yet been called into full play.

He lived much as other men lived, spending most of his energies in endeavouring to escape boredom, and never quite succeeding. He was in the swim; fair

faces smiled upon him, and matronly eyes encouraged him to make advances towards the blossoms that were carefully guarded from undesirable hands. 'Gather ye rose-buds while ye may,' they seemed to say; but somehow he was slow in availing himself of the permission. Flower after flower was hovered over and sighed over, until he found it suddenly snatched away, or was sickened of its sweetness. A true laggard in love was Lawrence Torwood: dallying with opportunities; sauntering when he should have put forth all his speed; whispering soft nothings when he should have uttered decisive words; and letting all his chances slip, just because he could never be thoroughly in earnest.

He could not contemplate marriage without leaping over the bridal day, and seeing an arid waste beyond the orange-blossoms. Sometimes (when a thinking mood was on

him) he would roughly divide the women of society into two classes. Firstly, there were the soft-spoken girls, formal and well-trained, who might be trusted to make good wives, and slowly bore a man to death. And secondly, there were the gay coquettes, who never failed to sparkle and amuse, but whose witcheries had a dash of *diablerie*—just enough to warn, while it enchanted a possible suitor. On all sides he found women to waltz with, and ride with, and laugh with. But where were the women to marry?

Doubtless they were to be found, as everything is to be found, if the seeker is resolved to find. But he was merely a seeker in name, never putting his heart into the search. And on the whole he was rather pleased with his want of success.

After a few walks with Eunice Swift, he discovered that she possessed a quality

which is rare in her sex; she could be a good comrade. And yet there was nothing in the least masculine in her manner or nature. Something soft and shy in the grey eyes, and something infinitely gentle in the sweet voice, always reminded him that she was a very woman.

They talked or were silent as the fancy of the moment dictated; there was no fetter nor barrier between them. And at every meeting some new similarity of thought was discovered, some fresh sympathy found out. Narrow as her world had been, her charity was wide, her judgment sound and true. He could speak to her as to a woman—not as he would have spoken to a society *belle;* and he was conscious of finding in her presence a haven of peace.

'You are going to leave this place?' he said one day.

It was afternoon—just such an afternoon as might have reigned perpetually in the Lotus-eater's paradise.

'All round the coast the languid air did swoon,
Breathing like one that hath a weary dream.'

The waters of the harbour were clouded by a thin haze, through which the vessels showed like phantoms; there was not a touch of intense colour anywhere to be found, nor a sharp outline to be seen; everything was dreamy and vague. You could not tell where shadow ended and substance began; there were no boundary lines visible; earth and sea and sky were all blended in the soft mist. Even the castle towers had lost their stern contour, and seemed to be slowly fading into a background of neutral tints. A purplish vapour had crept into the ruined chambers of the citadel; the elder-bushes that grew so luxuriantly in every nook and cavity were

motionless in the still atmosphere. The ivy, hanging in heavy masses over the crumbling stones, had put forth those thick clusters of small greenish blossoms which tell us that the year is near its end.

Captain Torwood and Eunice, apart from the rest of their party, were standing on the top of the flight of steps that led to the interior of the great tower.

'Yes, I am going away,' she answered absently.

'And you will be glad to go? You want to mingle with the madding crowd?'

'I shall only be a looker-on; I don't think I was meant to "mix with action,"' Eunice replied. 'Mine must always be a contemplative kind of life.'

'But you are one of the workers,' he said. 'Miss Wallace has been telling us about your book. You will be a swell one of these days.'

'Have I the elements of a swell in me?' she asked, with her soft little laugh.

'I am sure you have. It is lucky that you have plenty of occupation before you, Miss Swift; you will never know the horrors of *ennui*.'

'I think it will be a long while before I come to the end of all the things that interest me,' Eunice said frankly.

'Then you will keep young a long time. We never grow old while we are capable of being amused,' remarked Captain Torwood. 'For my part, I have used up all objects of interest, and age steals on me apace.'

Eunice glanced at him with an incredulous smile as he stood leaning against the broken masonry, a graceful figure, well-knit and strong. It was impossible to look long at that fair, handsome face without seeing in it the lines of power and thought; the golden moustache shaded a

boldly cut mouth and chin, and if the lips took a slight curve of disdain, it did not mar their beauty. The eyes, deep blue, had the brightness and clearness of a boy's eyes, and looked out honestly and fearlessly upon the whole world.

Undoubtedly it was a beautiful face, Eunice thought, and its owner must be destined to live a life of ease always, never knowing a thwarted wish, nor finding a crumpled rose-leaf.

As she looked at him, quietly and earnestly, she was conscious of a half-formed pain, the dull beginning of a heartache that she could not understand.

She might hope to rise steadily and surely in the world, never getting very high, perhaps, but just high enough to be lifted above the reach of want and care. But no matter how high she stood, he would never need a helping hand of hers;

there was nothing, absolutely *nothing*, that she could ever do for him.

Deep down in the heart of every true woman there is always a desire to render service to the man who is her chosen friend. In her nature there must ever be a craving after the queenly privilege of giving. Eunice, with this unconscious royalty of mind, began to suffer from a sense of poverty that could never be put into words.

She looked at the heir of the rich Miss Paisley, much as the dumb mermaid looked at the beautiful prince. She did not belong to his kingdom. And there could be nothing, she thought, that he would covet in her own sea-world of coral and shells. It was a fair world enough, purer and pleasanter than the region that he dwelt in; but society knew nothing about it. And a mermaid, although she might prove an

amusing companion for a day, would be wise if she stayed patiently in the retirement of her native deep.

There was silence for a few seconds; and then he became conscious of her scrutiny. He met the thoughtful eyes with a questioning glance.

'Why don't you resist the advances of old age?' she asked.

He slightly raised his eyebrows.

'Why do these stones let the ivy come creeping over them?' he said. 'Will you tell me how to begin resisting?'

'Just put forth some of your disused power, that's all. Just make an effort to get interested in something. Find an object——'

'No, don't tell me to find objects,' he entreated. 'The person with an object is such an atrocious nuisance to his fellows. He always wants them to see it too. He

can't be content to gaze, and press towards it alone. Somebody once wrote an excellent little book with a title that made me shudder. It was called "Life in Earnest," and I think it was cheap. Yes, I'm sure it was cheap, because an aunt of mine, in one of her benevolent moments, presented me with a copy.'

'I know the book,' Eunice said quietly.

'And you like it? If you were a rich aunt, you would present it to your frivolous nephew?'

'I don't know how it feels to be a rich aunt. But I was wondering where Longfellow discovered the young man who is supposed to give utterance to the "Psalm of Life." He doesn't exist nowadays, does he?'

'I think he does, in America. The Yankees are always wanting to make their lives sublime.'

'And some of them succeed, I fancy. Anyhow, they give us glimpses of the sublime in their books.'

'Yes, they do,' he admitted frankly. 'And they have more "go" in them, and a stronger sense of humour than we have. We never get any fun out of anything.'

'That's a melancholy confession,' said Eunice. 'I can almost find it in my heart to pity you, although I'm one of the poorest little women in the world. You remind me of Mrs. Browning's tired child at a show—

'"Who sees through tears the jugglers leap."

Now I am quite certain that I can get fun out of everything—jugglers and all.'

'Because the jugglers will be new to you,' he replied. 'You do well to pity me, Miss Swift; I envy your unwearied eyes! I dare say you have managed to be amused sometimes, even here?'

'Yes,' she answered, thinking of the little comedies which had made her dull life endurable. 'I have really found something to laugh at now and then, even in Seacastle. But I hope to laugh more by-and-by,' she added, in a tone which told him that mirth had probably been one of her prohibited things.

'Poor child!' he said, in a soft voice.

The best part of his nature was aroused at that moment; a man's compassion for a patient, suffering woman shone in his blue eyes. It would be a pleasant thing, he thought, to watch the light of happiness and the bloom of health coming into that wan face; it would be a positive joy to take her by the hand, and lead her out into the world, and witness her innocent delight in new scenes.

Thinking these thoughts, he surveyed her critically as she stood beside him in the

mellow sunshine. If she were dressed as the women of his circle dressed, how would she look? Pretty she never could be; but in the carriage of her small person, and the pose of her shapely head, there was a certain something which we call distinguished for want of a better word. And it was a significant fact that Eunice, despite her shabbiness, always received from servants, railway-porters, and shopmen, that involuntary respect which Mrs. Goad could never command.

Captain Torwood's glance, long-practised, took in all the girl's good points in an instant. There was in her sad face a kind of nobility which made him reverence her while he pitied. He realized the dignity of this lonely woman, who had quietly defended her refinement and self-respect against those who had tried hard to deprive her of both.

She turned and looked at him with a frank gratitude in her grey eyes, just as if she could read all those kindly yearnings that had never risen to his lips. And the look and smile thrilled him suddenly and strangely, piercing through the thick crust of selfishness and conventionalism which had been forming over his heart for years.

He was by no means an impulsive man; and yet it is certain that an impulse did verily master him just at that moment.

Her fingers were trifling idly with the ivy-leaves that clustered all round them on the ruined wall. And with a quick movement he took possession of that little hand, and kept it fast imprisoned in his own.

It need scarcely be said that he was perfectly well used to imprisoning little hands in this fashion; but it would have been hard to explain why the touch of these fragile fingers saddened him, and

made him half ashamed of himself. They were, however, soon withdrawn from his clasp, and Eunice said simply:

'I shall be expected at home, Captain Torwood; I must go.'

She began to descend the flight of steps as she spoke, and he mechanically followed her. Down below they found Cora Wallace, seated on a bench between Angeline and Bride, and Eunice said adieu to them all.

As she turned her steps towards White Cottage, she felt as if she were leaving a fairy-land behind her. Never had the castle precincts looked so beautiful, invested as they were with the golden charm of autumn; never had that green spot upon the old wall appeared so like an enchanted bower. But stern common-sense was never far away from Eunice Swift, and it aided her that day to escape from a perilous dreamland.

'Eunice is not so plain as she was,' thought Mrs. Bertie, meeting her sister in the entry.

The next morning brought a letter which was destined to shorten her stay in Seacastle. Mr. Redcliffe, tired of the sea-side, and impatient to get back to his literary work, had insisted on returning to town. He sent an urgent request to Miss Swift to come at once to Queen Anne Street. And Eunice was thankful for the summons, and felt herself quite ready to depart.

Mr. Swift and Matilda appeared to have washed their hands of the girl and her concerns. She would surely come back again, they said, like the bad shilling; and when Lavinia faintly hinted that Eunice might possibly get on in the world, she was answered with angry sneers. So Lavinia was silent, and did not venture to show any great interest in Eunice's humble prepara-

tions, which were, however, very speedily completed.

When her school trunk was packed, and all the luggage-labels made ready, Eunice snatched half an hour to go and say farewell to some of her old friends—those lowly friends who dwelt in shabby cottages, and sent their little boys and girls to the Sunday-school. She refrained from taking leave of any of the upper-class neighbours; to have done so would have irritated Mrs. Goad, who would instantly have declared that she was trying to win their sympathy and work upon their compassion. So she resolved to content herself with the good-byes and parting blessings of the poor, and in truth desired nothing more.

It was her intention to leave Seacastle early on a Tuesday morning, and it was on Monday evening that her last visits had to be paid. She slipped out, just at sunset,

when the mists were rising and the light waning, and took her way first to a little cottage that stood, quite alone, upon a desolate part of the shore.

A man, dressed in a dark blue woollen shirt, was standing in the doorway, looking out across the waste of greenish mud left by the receding tide. That mud was his harvest field, where periwinkles were to be found; but Luke Gosling had other occupations besides 'winkling.' He had a share in a wherry, and went out fishing with his mates, and in his spare hours he cultivated vegetables in his garden. Of late, life had gone pretty smoothly with Luke; he had been able to provide comfortably for the wife and little ones, and had even risen so high as to purchase a donkey and cart. But, not so very long ago, he had known what it was to be very low in the world, so low that he had

almost lost the hope of ever rising again.

In those days there had been a friend who had sat by his side in his sickness, and had talked to him, and told him stories that had made him forget his troubles. While she had talked, her hands were often busy with patching and mending —doing some of that necessary work which his poor burdened wife had been forced to leave undone. She had never given him any money; he had known quite well that the kind heart and the empty purse often go together. But, in a way past explaining, she had managed to help the whole family. She had come in amongst them and toiled with them, putting her shoulder to the wheel just as if they had a right to demand her services, and they had all felt the most perfect confidence in her strength and sympathy.

And now Luke Gosling knew that this friend was going away. The news had been whispered to his little Jenny by Rachel at White Cottage; and Jenny had come home to her mother in an agony of tears.

The tide-pools were glittering here and there with amber light; golden rays came slanting across the coarse grass that grew sparsely outside his garden fence. The donkey, standing contentedly in her shed, put her grey nose out of the doorway as if to remind Luke of her presence. He glanced at her with all the pardonable pride of ownership, but his thoughts soon came back to the cause of little Jenny's grief; and then his wife stepped out upon the threshold and stood by his side.

'I s'pose there's no mistake, Jane!' he said. 'It must be true enough that Miss Swift's going away?'

'Oh yes, it's true enough,' she answered.

'And Rachel said she was a-going to a good home—a home up in London. That child Jenny nearly cried herself sick, and no wonder!'

'She's goin', Jane; goin', and we can't make her no returns. That's what frets me!'

Jane Gosling gave her husband's arm an energetic pull. Although the low light was dazzling her eyes, she had caught sight of a slim figure coming towards them across the coarse grass, and Luke looked up to meet Eunice's wistful gaze.

'Miss,' he said abruptly, 'be you really come to say good-bye?'

'Yes, Luke,' she replied. 'And I have come, too, to ask you to do me a kindness: the very last kindness, perhaps, that I ever shall ask of anyone here.'

'Think o' that, Jane!' said Luke ecstatically. 'It do seem as if she'd read my very thoughts!'

'I want you to take my luggage to the station in your donkey-cart,' Eunice continued. 'It will be a great help to me, Luke; the fly costs eighteen-pence, you know. I shall start to-morrow morning by the eight o'clock train.'

The faces of husband and wife literally beamed at this request; it tempered the pain of parting, as Eunice had intended that it should. Luke Gosling was proud of his new possessions, and all his pride in them was doubled and trebled at this moment; moreover, there was no small pleasure in knowing that the landlord of the Crab, who kept a fly or two, and charged fancy prices for their use, would lose one-and-sixpence. Miss Swift (bless her heart!) should have her boxes carried to the railway-station for nothing; and Luke would be at White Cottage by seven o'clock to bring the luggage downstairs.

'Rachel 'll want me to lend her a hand, miss,' he said cheerily, 'and I shan't leave your things till I've seen 'em all safe into the luggage-van.'

'Thank you, Luke; that will be a great comfort,' answered Eunice simply. 'I'm not well used to travelling, you know, and I shall be glad to have some one to look after me.'

She spoke bravely enough, and yet, just for an instant, a pain smote her sharply. Other women had fathers, brothers, or lovers to 'look after them;' she had only Luke Gosling, the rough fisherman.

But the pang passed as quickly as it came; the farewells were cheerfully spoken, and even little Jenny's tears were stayed by the promise of a brand-new story-book to be sent to her from London. Eunice walked homeward along the lonely shore, remembering the days when she had trodden this

very path in bitterness of heart, and comparing the doleful past with the hopeful present. She had a spirit that was 'thankfu' for sma' mercies,' perhaps; but then the 'mercies' that would have seemed but molehills to some people were like mountains of joy to her. There were patches of blue in the sky that had been long covered with clouds, and the soul of this poor traveller was full of gratitude and peace.

One or two other cottages were visited before the September night set in, and then Eunice returned to her attic. It looked very bare and cheerless now; all the pen-and-ink pictures were taken down from the walls, and the photograph in its oak frame was packed up with her scanty stock of treasures. She was too tired to take a tender farewell of her old chamber that night; and even the parting with her father

did not move her as she had thought that it would.

'Well, Eunice,' said Mr. Swift, taking up his bedroom candle, 'you are determined to choose your own course, and I hope you'll keep to the straight road. As you couldn't treat Matilda properly, you would only have embittered my last days if you had stayed here. I wish that you may prosper, but I doubt it.'

'Thank you, papa,' Eunice answered, quite cheerfully.

A word of tenderness, a touch of regret, would have unnerved her at once, and sent her to bed weeping and distrusting herself. But the harshness and the reference to Matilda gave her strength, and hardened the poor little heart that was only too ready to be soft and wavering. If, at this sharp turning-point of her life, things had shaped themselves differently, she might have gone

back to the dead level of her old dull existence, and have resolutely extinguished her yearnings after a larger sphere. But the doubtful moment was past; and she went to her attic as cool and firm as if no change awaited her on the morrow.

The morning was fresh and still, and the village was scarcely astir when the cavalcade passed through the street on its way to the railway-station. First came Eunice, carrying her satchel and a shabby shawl; Luke followed, walking proudly at the donkey's head, and glancing over his shoulder sometimes to assure himself of the safety of the luggage in the cart. Ted Gosling, a sturdy lad of fourteen, brought up the rear, and gave himself airs of importance. The procession passed Myrtle Villa, and was greeted with derision by Mrs. Goad, peeping cautiously through the closed blinds of her bedroom. But Eunice

marched on without bestowing a single glance upon Matilda's windows.

As she drew near the gate of The Nest, her heart began to beat with a faint hope of catching one last glimpse of Bride. Eunice had written her a loving note of farewell, but Bride was still delicate, and the old habit of early rising had been discontinued since her fall from the phaeton. Her friend had, therefore, but small expectation of seeing her in these last moments, and yet, in her heart-loneliness, Eunice felt that the least parting sign would be unspeakably dear. She was young; it seemed to be a hard fate that had condemned her to be utterly self-sufficing. She yearned for a little love, a little sympathy to look back upon and think over in years to come.

The gate opened as she approached, and Hannah appeared with a tin box of sandwiches. In the next instant Bride herself

came tripping down the garden path and joined her.

'Eunice,' she said, 'I'm going with you to the railway-station. You must take Hannah's sandwiches, else she'll be mortally wounded. And Aunt Margery has sent you a bottle of cherry cordial. Now give me that satchel directly, and don't look at me like that!'

For tears were gathering in Eunice's eyes, and there was the faintest possibility of a scene. Bride made a snatch at the satchel, deposited the sandwiches and cordial inside it, and then drew Eunice's arm within her own.

'Come,' she cried, 'this isn't only the prosaic road to the train; it's the direct path to fame. Think of all the people who have ever gone marching on to victory, and then march serenely after them.'

'I am marching after them,' Eunice

answered with a tremulous little laugh. 'But not quite serenely, I'm afraid.'

They walked at a brisk pace along the quiet road, and Eunice took a silent leave of all the familiar things. Strips of gossamer clung to the yellowing hedges, and floated on the still air; sparrows chirped and twittered. The light was dreamy and soft, and white mists hung gauze-like over the level fields. Seacastle was a flowery old place, and its gardens always made a brave show in autumn. The fluted velvet of dahlias could be seen behind decaying fences; yellow snapdragons flourished in the crannies of mouldering walls; old porches were laden with the tender pink clusters of the monthly rose. She gave a parting sigh to the flowers, and that was all.

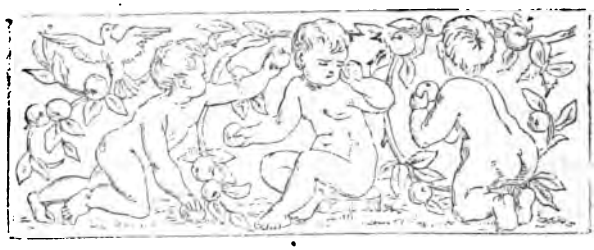
When they had passed the last cottages, and were approaching the viaduct, her lips

quivered once; but there were no more tears. They climbed the steps to the platform, and Luke and his boy staggered up manfully after them, carrying the box. Then the ticket was taken, and they learnt that the train might be expected in three minutes. There was scanty time for last words. As Eunice stepped out of the booking-office a column of white steam arose above the autumn trees.

She took a hasty leave of her faithful henchmen, and received Bride's earnest kiss. Then the train rushed up, the door of a second-class carriage was opened, and she found herself the solitary occupant of the compartment. It was all over in another minute. She caught a last glimpse of Bride's blue eyes, and saw a fisherman's hat waved wildly in the air. And then she was whirled away.

She was quite composed now. With a

calm face she looked out upon the square tower of the castle rising rugged and stern above the roofs of the village. Through the open window came the morning breath of the incoming tide, and fanned her cheek with a briny coolness. It was the last farewell of the sea.



## CHAPTER II.

### 'MUCH IS TO LEARN, MUCH TO FORGET.'

IT was October; and although there were still sunbeams and flowers, the days were short and the nights long; and Seacastle was beginning to prepare itself for the coming winter.

Cora Wallace had gone away for a few days, and a pensive mood had come upon Bride. The languor of the dying year seemed to be stealing over her spirit; she missed the stimulating influence of Cora's caustic speeches—missed too the stolen meetings with Eunice Swift.

There were no brisk winds to sweep the autumn mists away and clear the thick atmosphere; the air was heavy with the scent of rotting leaves; people were beginning to whisper vague hints of fever. Bride, absorbed in her reveries, went about in a dream, and did not notice that Uncle Andrew followed all her movements with wistful eyes, and that Aunt Margery and Hannah were unsettled and ill at ease.

One afternoon, between four and five o'clock, she strolled slowly down the long garden-path on her way to her old shrubbery-seat. All around the trees were shedding their leaves; the glory of the flower-beds had departed; the blaze of nasturtiums was gone, but the dull purple monks-hood shot up its spires, and sober Michaelmas daisies grew in stiff clusters. Roses were still lingering here and there; the Gloire de Dijon (always plentiful in

Seacastle) was trying to unfold its crowded petals in the waning sunshine; but its buds swelled without bursting into full bloom, and hung heavy and chill for lack of a stronger sun.

Bride remembered the abundant blooms of the early summer, and sighed. And then her eyes fell on a group of pansies, rich in their royal velvet, and glittering with autumn dew; and she stooped down to gather them. Victor Ashburn had been fond of the pansy, the quaint old-world flower that all 'the sons of light' had loved to sing about, and Shelley had wreathed into a melancholy crown. It was verily a flower of remembrance; in the May-days it had been the companion of hyacinths and lilies, and all the queen blossoms of the year; and now in the damp air of October it lived among scattered rose-leaves, and

whispered to the wintry chrysanthemums of the summer that was past.

Hannah's voice came ringing faintly down the long path, and Bride, looking up languidly, saw the old servant approaching, and beckoning with an impatient hand. Hannah's placid old face was flushed, her eyes were shining, and she was carrying herself altogether like a younger and prouder woman.

'There's great news, my dear—good news,' said she, speaking slowly and impressively. 'Your father will be here to-morrow.'

'Is he *really* coming?' Bride asked. 'But it will only be for a short visit; I shall see him, and lose him again,' she added wearily.

'No, you will not lose him again, Miss Bride. Wasn't I always telling you to have patience? Your father is coming to

take you away from this place; you are going to lead a very different life, and you'll have done for ever with Mrs. Goad and all her set!'

Hannah spoke the last words with a toss of her ancient cap; and Bride laughed merrily and unrestrainedly.

'How lightly you take it, miss!' said the good woman, with offended dignity. 'You must go at once to your aunt, if you please. Sir Bertram's telegram has just come, and she has a great deal to tell you.'

'Who on earth is Sir Bertram?' demanded Bride.

'Your father,' replied Hannah solemnly.

Bride was silent. Instinctively she lifted the pansies, and pressed the damp velvet petals against her cheek, as if to assure herself that she was not dreaming; and then she walked slowly into the house.

The minister and his wife were seated in their armchairs, one on each side of the hearth. A small fire was burning, but the open lattice freely admitted the soft air and the last mellow light of the autumn day.

Mrs. Ormiston was folding and unfolding the telegram with fingers that trembled. Bride could hear the rustling of the crisp paper in the stillness. She spoke first, partly to relieve her aunt of the necessity of beginning, and partly because there was a considerable strain upon her own patience. Why had all the mystery existed so long?

'Hannah tells me that papa is coming,' she said; 'and she calls him Sir Bertram. Aunt Margery, why have I never been told that he is Sir Bertram?'

But it was the minister who answered her question.

'He has only been Sir Bertram lately;

three weeks ago he was plain Bertram Netterville. You think we have been making unnecessary mysteries, my bairn; but we have acted as we thought best. Now come here, and sit in your old place, while I talk to you.'

Mr. Ormiston's voice had its usual quieting influence upon the girl's spirit. A moment ago she had been half disposed to resent the long silence of her faithful guardians; but Uncle Andrew's words brought back all her old sense of perfect trust in his wisdom. In silence she drew a footstool to his side, and sat down at his feet as she had sat in her childhood. His hand wandered gently over her soft hair, and sometimes rested on her shoulder as he talked, and his tone was just as calm as if he had been telling one of the old fairy legends, so beloved in her nursery days. Aunt Margery held the message crushed in

her fingers, and settled herself in her chair with a rigid face.

'Years ago,' Uncle Andrew began, 'there were two orphan sisters, living a retired life in a little village in Oakshire; the elder was your aunt Margery there, and the younger was your mother, Bridget Thorne. They had no relatives, very few friends, and only a small income, so that the world took but slight notice of such a lowly pair, and they were all in all to each other. Margery, being ten years older than Bridget, was more like a mother than a sister, and truly no mother could ever have been more unselfish and kind.'

Bride stole a glance in her aunt's direction; but Mrs. Ormiston was shielding her face with her hand. While the minister talked, her youth was coming back to her like a perfume of days gone by. Dreams, hopes, sorrows, such as Bride could never

understand, were returning as she sat and listened to this old tale.

'Bridget was beautiful,' Mr. Ormiston went on. 'She had, as folks said, the air of a princess, and yet she was a winsome lass for all that. Ah, well! one need not be dwelling too long upon those old times. The Lord lifted the tender feet out of the rugged way, and set them in a quiet resting-place! You are like her, my bairn; but there is more pride in your nature than there ever was in hers—ay, and more strength too!'

'I am glad to be like her,' Bride said softly.

'We have seen the likeness growing and growing, Bride,' he continued tenderly. 'And sometimes when you have thought your aunt stern, she has been looking at her own lost sister in your face. You will learn by-and-by, my lassie, that there are

some who must give you either frowns or tears; and Margery has meant well—always meant well, when she has kept the tears back.'

'She might have meant well, but it would have been wiser to have shed them!' thought Bride, with a quiet sigh.

'And now comes the romantic part of the story,' said the minister, more lightly. 'Such a bonny birdie as Bridget must needs have her lovers; and it was small wonder, say I, that old Sir Hugh Netterville's two sons should seek her out. Sir Hugh's park and the cottage garden were only kept apart by a fence, and it was a fence that lads could climb easily enough. But these lads were not alike in their wooing, Bride, for James meant sport, and Bertram meant earnest; and James was the eldest son and heir. And at last, when the game got too serious, what could Mar-

gery do but send her young sister to London to stay a while with an old governess?'

The girl moved restlessly in her seat, and looked up at the speaker with eager eyes. But Mrs. Ormiston still sat as motionless as stone.

'Margery stayed behind to take care of the cottage; but Hannah, the faithful maid, was sent to town with Bridget. And as Hannah had relations in London, her mistress gave her leave to remain there for a day or two. She did remain a week, and then came back to make a startling confession to Miss Thorne. Bridget and Bertram Netterville had been married privately in a London church, and Hannah had witnessed the wedding.'

'And afterwards?' said Bride breathlessly.

'Bertram was afraid to tell his father the truth, and the secret had to be kept.

But Margery at once resolved to leave Brackenhurst and follow her sister to London. She quitted the cottage and went up to town with Hannah; and then began a time of deep anxiety for both sisters. But it was ordained that Margery's burden should not be borne alone; I married her, Bride, and took my share of the family troubles. And not very long after our marriage the heaviest blow fell.'

Uncle Andrew paused, and passed his hand once or twice across his forehead. He had told the story freely and fluently, but now that it was nearly ended, his eloquence began to fail. Aunt Margery seemed to shrink and dwindle in her chair; the tall upright figure appeared to have suddenly succumbed to old age; her head had sunk down upon her bosom; her face was hidden in her trembling hands. But Bride did not notice her at all.

'Uncle Andrew,' the girl cried impatiently, 'what was the heaviest blow?'

'My bairn, it is hard to explain everything. It seems that when Bertram returned to Brackenhurst, he had a bitter quarrel with his brother James. I have never known the full story of that quarrel; both were young and hot-headed, and doubtless many passionate things were said. James Netterville was, I believe, a weakly man—one of those men to whom excitement is often fatal—and he died, suddenly and terribly, with angry words upon his lips. Sir Hugh's heart was bound up in his eldest son, and he could never forgive Bertram; he banished him from his sight for ever.'

'It was cruel and unjust to banish my poor father,' said Bride, with indignation.

'At that time it seemed quite unlikely that Bertram would ever succeed to the

title,' proceeded Uncle Andrew. 'There was another son, William, who came next to poor James. Sir Hugh consented to make Bertram an allowance on condition that he would never return to England during his father's life. It was not a very liberal allowance, Bride; but then Sir Hugh knew nothing of the marriage; in fact, he never did know it to the day of his death.'

'Then my grandfather never knew of my existence, Uncle Andrew?'

'No, child; and he would not have been gracious to you if he had known it. He was a stern old man, I fancy; his wife had been dead for years, and there was no one to plead for Bertram. Well, Bertram went abroad, and it was arranged that Bridget should follow him after her baby was born. She never did follow him; you have been

told, my lassie, that she died when you were only a few weeks old.'

'Poor mother!' Bride whispered tearfully.

'And then you were left to us, Bride,' the minister continued, with a slight tremor in his voice. 'If we had told you that your father was Sir Hugh Netterville's son, we should but have made you discontented with your lot. Even when we heard that William Netterville had died unmarried, we still kept silence; Sir Hugh was living on, a hale old man who might survive Bertram. But now——'

He stroked her hair with a trembling hand, and paused to draw a long breath. The girl drew that kind hand down to her lips, and kissed it lovingly.

'But now the time to speak has come. May the Lord guide you, my bairn, when the world's glare dazzles your eyes! Sir

Hugh is dead; he died quite suddenly; and your father comes in for the title and all the property.'

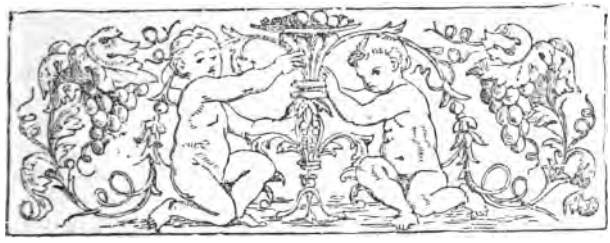
There was a moment of deep silence; the rich, dreamy light of the autumn sunset filled the little room with a strange glory, and Bride rose up from her low seat and stood upright in the glow.

'Uncle Andrew,' she said, 'if I had known all this before, I think I should have been more loving, more grateful. I want you to forgive me—you and Aunt Margery—for all the things that I have ever done amiss. You have both been so good to me, and there is nothing that I can do for you—nothing! As to our parting, I will not think of it, I cannot speak of it now.'

She turned and left the room. And in the next minute Hannah saw her tall lithe figure going swiftly down the long garden-

path, moving like one who was hardly conscious of motion.

'If I had known it all before,' Bride was repeating to herself—'if I had only known it all before, it would have changed my life!'



## CHAPTER III.

### 'IS THY FACE LIKE THY MOTHER'S, MY FAIR CHILD?'

IT was not unnatural that Bride should lie awake all night, rehearsing the *rôle* of a duteous daughter, and resolving to devote herself heart and soul to a father who had been so cruelly exiled. She thought that she knew exactly what he would be like—gentle, somewhat spiritless, crushed by early sorrow and long banishment. He would lean on her a good deal, of course; and for the

future she must not expect to belong to herself. He would never be satisfied unless she was constantly by his side; she would be required to read aloud, to sing to him, to walk with him, to do everything, in short, to freshen his blighted life, and charm his thoughts away from a dreary past.

Naturally, too, her own new position had to be looked at in various lights; she was not so perfect a Christian as to refrain from chuckling a little over the discomfiture of Mrs. Goad. And then, just as the October dawn was slowly breaking, and the leaves outside the lattice were rustling in the breath of morning, she fell asleep and dreamed. Yet it was not a dream of the new life, but an old dream of a boat gliding over a smooth sea; and Victor Ashburn's eyes were looking into hers again. She stretched out her hands to touch him, and

then woke with a start to find Hannah standing by her side.

'It's growing late, my dear,' said Hannah, in a soothing tone. 'But I wouldn't have wakened you if you had not seemed so restless. You were murmuring and moving your arms, and an uneasy sleep is best broken. There's a lot of packing to be done to-day,' added the good woman, with a sigh of importance.

'A lot of packing,' repeated Bride, smiling drowsily. 'Nonsense, Hannah! you know that my possessions consist of three or four shabby frocks.'

Hannah winced a little at this bit of plain-speaking; and her young mistress, raising herself on her elbow, looked at her with laughing eyes.

'You silly old thing!' cried the girl lovingly. 'You know that I haven't come in for any of the magnificence yet. Don't

you think they will have a poor opinion of my old brown serge at Brackenhurst Park? But never mind, Hannah, we will soon show them that we know how to dress when we have got money to spend.'

The old servant answered her with an admiring glance. They might think what they liked of the brown serge, but there could be no question about the beauty of the wearer. Bride might go to her father's mansion like Enid in the faded silk—

> '——— a blossom vermeil-white,
> That lightly breaks its faded flower-sheath;'

and none would fail to recognise her charms.

'It will be a proud time for me, my dearie, when I see you in all your glory,' said Hannah, with glistening eyes. 'Your aunt always promised that I should go to live with you, and it isn't likely that Sir Bertram will say me nay.'

'My father! oh no, he will not refuse

me anything!' Bride responded confidently. 'I shall tell him, of course, that I cannot possibly do without you. But, Hannah, I must have some breakfast up here, I believe; I am feeling heavy and unrefreshed. You see I am beginning fine-lady ways already!'

But no one in the household was in the least disposed to find fault with this small piece of fine-ladyhood. Aunt Margery was feverishly anxious that Bride should be looking her best when her father arrived. She fidgeted here and there in a way that was so unlike her usual formal self, that Uncle Andrew was half alarmed and half angry. He made two or three long speeches on the folly of being over-anxious about anything; and then, finding that his words were falling on deaf ears, went out upon the shore to meditate, until his wife should have returned to her usual frame of mind.

A letter had followed Sir Bertram's

telegram. He might be expected at Seacastle at five in the afternoon, and would remain all night. Bride must be ready to take her departure with him on the following day, and they were to proceed direct to Brackenhurst.

All through that long morning, Mrs. Ormiston was expending her strength in a hundred unnecessary efforts, dragging about boxes, turning out drawers, and looking more and more haggard as the day wore on. Bride's gentle protests were not heeded in the least; her aunt toiled desperately, scarcely pausing to eat, and hardly speaking till the trunks were corded and the labels gummed on.

The minister looked ruefully at his wife when she came downstairs at four o'clock, wearing her best cap and gown. Such traces of comeliness as had survived the wear and tear of life had now entirely

vanished from her face, a long, pale, melancholy face, rendered all the more ghastly by the violet cap-ribbons. Twenty-one years ago, when Bertram Netterville had wooed and won her sister Bridget, Margery had been a good-looking woman of thirty; nowadays everybody spoke of her as an old lady, and to-day she might have been taken for a woman of sixty-five, or even seventy. What would Sir Bertram think of this sister-in-law, who would look at him with lack-lustre eyes, and smile on him with lips from which the last vestiges of bloom had departed?

Good man as he was, Mr. Ormiston could not help feeling a little mortified when he surveyed his spouse with a critical glance. His Margery had always been a good woman; but it could not be said that her goodness wore a lovely aspect. Years ago the girl Bridget had shrunk from telling

her heart-secrets to her stern sister; and from her earliest childhood Bride had hidden her feelings resolutely from Aunt Margery's searching gaze. Hannah, and Uncle Andrew himself, had found it easy to win the girl's confidence; and all the little thoughts and plans that were carefully concealed from Mrs. Ormiston had been openly confided to them.

And now Bride was going to leave her guardians, and the minister's heart told him that she would part with one of them without any deep regret.

Aunt Margery had been a faithful guide, but the hand that had clasped Bride's soft little fingers had been cased in a glove of iron. Her voice had only known one tone —the tone of warning; praise, encouragement, tenderness, were notes that she could not utter. Well was it for Bride that her uncle and nurse could sing in another key,

for their voices had made the sweetest music in her young life.

And yet the minister knew that his poor Margery's heart was torn with the anguish of parting from Bridget's bairn. He had spoken truly in saying that she gave frowns instead of tears. Hers was one of those oyster-natures which turns its rough shell to the world, and tightly shuts up its pearls; but who, alas, is the better for the treasures that are never disclosed to view?

The moment hoped for, yet dreaded, came at last; and Sir Bertram arrived in the waning sunshine of the afternoon.

He was a tall slender man, and had an indescribably withered look, although he had hardly passed the prime of life. A small well-shaped head; hair soft and fine, a mixture of silver and gold; delicate cameo features; eyes a cold blue; a tawny

moustache untouched with grey; perfect hands and feet. Bride took rapid note of all these details, and decided at once that he was a father of whom any daughter might be justly proud.

But there were traces in his face of irritability, instead of the melancholy which she had so confidently expected to find there. If Sir Bertram had ever suffered deeply, he had entirely outlived his early sorrow. A thoroughly selfish man, with expensive tastes and limited means, is rarely known to cherish the griefs of his youth; and Bertram Netterville had found it so hard to get all the comforts he wanted in life, that the struggle left him no leisure to lament the wife he had lost. Looking at that fretful, aristocratic face, you felt it difficult to believe that this man had ever experienced a great passion. His voice was silvery, but a little querulous at times;

and the bland manner was only the mask of a peevish temper.

He met his daughter with a grace that chilled, while it set her at ease. He kissed her calmly, spoke a few well-chosen words, and looked at her with serene approval. Then, turning to Aunt Margery, who stood stiff and speechless with suppressed emotion, he thanked her for the care which she had bestowed on his dear child.

'So good of you, dear Margery, to have trained her,' he said. 'Of course I always felt that she was safe in your hands, but I hardly hoped to find her so perfectly—satisfactory! I am really delighted to claim her, I assure you.'

He was delighted to claim her—not because she was the child of his lost Bridget, but because she possessed a patrician type of beauty, and a repose of manner and movement which satisfied his

fastidious taste. With her quick instinct, Bride had instantly divined that her feelings were not wanted here; all that was required of her was a gentle expression of pleasure, and she bore herself as tranquilly as Cora Wallace would have done.

But from that moment the girl knew that her dream of filial tenderness was shattered for ever. Life with Sir Bertram would not be in the least like the life that she had pictured to herself. Yet it might be a very pleasant existence, and some of her old cravings, at any rate, would be amply satisfied.

The instincts of race had ever been strong in Bride; she had always longed to be surrounded with all the luxuries and refinements of life; the hereditary fastidiousness was developed prominently in her character, and had been one of the causes of her unpopularity with the ladies of Seacastle.

Well, the sordid village life had come to an end at last; and now there would be wealth and dignity and ancestral halls for Bride Netterville. She had yet to learn the true value of these things; but that knowledge would be gained by-and-by.

'I have a wretched digestion,' said Sir Bertram, looking mournfully at Mrs. Ormiston's tea-pot. 'In fact, I fear I must confess myself to be a confirmed invalid. You are to be envied, Ormiston; in spite of your years, you are a younger man than I am.'

'I have not had so much knocking about in the world as you have,' replied the minister. 'But you will renew your youth when you are settled at home. Your native air, and the society of your child, will restore all the health you have lost.'

'Health never returns when it has once taken flight,' said Sir Bertram petulantly.

'A narrow income has been the destruction of my liver; for years I have had to deny myself the very comforts that I most required. All the best part of my life has gone by in exile.'

'Not "the best part," I hope,' remarked Uncle Andrew cheerfully. 'The evening may be better than the dawn. I think you are taking too gloomy a view of yourself. Here is Bride, ready to brighten the close of your day; we shall miss her sorely enough, but we give her up gladly to you.'

'She will be duly prized,' responded Sir Bertram, with an approving glance at his daughter, a glance which Bride returned with just the right kind of smile. How quickly and easily she was learning to adapt herself to the tastes of this newly found father! Poor Aunt Margery noticed this exchange of smiles with a pang of jealousy;

in all the years of family intercourse there had never been any freemasonry established between Bride and herself. And there had been the same invisible barrier between Bridget's life and her own—Bridget had always got on admirably with strangers, while with Margery she had ever been silent, shrinking, and repressed. It was all incomprehensible and infinitely sad, thought the poor woman, stirring her untasted tea, and looking so grim that even her husband quickly averted his eyes from her face.

'She will do,' said the Baronet, when he found himself alone with the Ormistons. 'My dear Margery, I am not given to ecstacies, but she is really one of the loveliest girls I have ever seen. Our poor Bridget was very pretty, but Bride is taller, more distinguished—in short, she has all the grace of the Nettervilles. If my father

could have seen her, I think he might have been charmed into forgiving my youthful follies.'

His youthful follies! The minister looked in silent amazement at this man, who could speak thus lightly and pleasantly of a tragedy which had darkened more lives than one. Mrs. Ormiston did not attempt to utter a reply. Her thoughts had gone back to the death-bed of the poor Bridget who had been so airily pronounced 'very pretty;' and she remembered that the young wife's last words had been a message to her husband, 'her dear Bertram, who loved her so.' Ah me! what was love? Was it a thing worth living for, or dying for? Aunt Margery was asking herself these troubled questions, and getting lost in the mazes of memory, while the guest talked on.

'While we are on this subject, Ormis-

ton,' continued Sir Bertram, 'I must also say a word about the dear girl's expenses. They have not, I hope, inconvenienced you very much? My wretchedly limited means made it so difficult for me to spare a pound, that I fear I left the burden on your hands too long. But you will allow me to offer you——'

'Nothing,' interrupted the minister, with a gesture of decision. 'The lassie has been the light of our eyes; we want no pay for harbouring a sunbeam. Say no more on this point, Bertram, if you do not wish to pain us both.'

'What a good man you are, my dear Ormiston!' said Sir Bertram, not effusively, but in a tone that gave a hint of subdued feeling. 'All these years I have had no home to give my poor motherless girl; it would be difficult for you even to imagine what an unsettled life I have led. And

then there was the anxiety of waiting for news from Brackenhurst. When William's death was announced, I was worried by the thought of coming into an empty title. I did not know how far my father's animosity would go; but I am happy in thinking that it died with him.'

It was a relief to us also, Bertram, when we found that you would inherit all your late mother's property. Without adequate means, it would have been impossible to have kept up Brackenhurst.'

'I should not have attempted such a thing. The place must have been let, and I should probably have continued to live abroad. But all has ended satisfactorily, and I can give my daughter her rightful position at last. It is well for her that the tide has turned for me while she is still in the bloom of her youth; and well for her,

too, that she has had such guardians as dear Margery and yourself.'

And then the three parted for the night, and the Baronet stumbled up the dark stairs to the chamber prepared for his use.

He shut the door, gave vent to an expletive or two, and bemoaned himself to himself. A night spent in this poor little room would be a grievance to be looked back upon and grumbled over for months to come.

## CHAPTER IV.

'AND YE SHALL WALK IN SILK ATTIRE.'

THEY were not to start till afternoon; but Bride rose early, and went out into the old garden soon after the tardy sunrise.

It was now a wilderness of yellow leaves, with clusters of evergreens showing darkly here and there, and walks and foliage were dank with heavy dew. She was wearing a dark grey tweed gown, which Aunt Margery, with some vague anticipation of a hasty summons, had had made for her, and

she drew the skirt carefully away from contact with the wet bushes. It was by no means a costly gown, but suitable enough for a travelling costume, and tasteful enough to stand the test of Sir Bertram's criticism. As to ball and dinner-dresses, she could have them in plenty by-and-by; but this homely tweed was, perhaps, the last gift of a self-denying love.

As she looked down at the soft grey skirt, the sudden tears sprang to her eyes, and there came to her that keen consciousness of loss which does so often come to us in the midst of newly found prosperity. Our delicate kid gloves will not hold out kindly palms to us in our need, nor will our Paris shoes run to succour us like the willing feet of an old friend. The grave aunt and uncle had been dull companions for a young girl; and yet what good thing had she lacked with them? She had never

known the extent of their sacrifices for her sake, but she did know that they had lived for her, rather than for themselves.

There was a rich cluster of pansies, purple and gold, growing in the old spot. She stooped and gathered a handful, and then carried them upstairs to her room, where they would be kept fresh in a glass of water till she was ready to depart. She wanted to wear some of the old garden flowers on her journey: flowers that would breathe sweetly of this lowly home that she was going to leave. Hannah was going too; and Hannah's substitute, an accommodating widow of the village, was now busily preparing breakfast in the kitchen.

So, in the first sunshine of that autumn morning, she took her farewell glimpse of the garden. The wet ivy was shining in the fresh light; golden leaves were dropping from the wall; a bird was chirping in the

leafless walnut-tree. Her lattice, twinkling under the thatch, was still framed in late-blowing roses; overhead some clouds were slowly breaking apart and showing a deep blue cleft; the smoke went up in a thin column from the quaint old chimney. Just then, Hannah, in her second-best black gown, appeared at the back-door and summoned her into the house.

Sir Bertram at the breakfast-table was somewhat languid and silent. He had had a restless night, and had seen a spider running across his coverlet. The Nest was literally a nest of spiders, he thought; a miserably unwholesome little place, that ought to have been pulled down long ago. It was wonderful that Bride could have managed to exist in it all these years, and grow up into a healthy, beautiful Englishwoman. She must have inherited her aunt Margery's strength of constitution.

It certainly was a most fortunate thing that she had turned out to be strong; a delicate daughter on one's hands would have been a terrible nuisance. Girls with unsound lungs or weak spines were always difficult to marry; and even when married, they sometimes appealed for paternal help to settle the doctors' bills. But Bride, with that pure creamy skin, and those clear blue eyes, would assuredly set all doctors at defiance.

At last the hour of parting came, and Sir Bertram was not quite free from the fear of a scene. But Bride proved herself a true daughter of the Nettervilles, and if her lips quivered at Uncle Andrew's last blessing, she contrived to keep back the tears. Aunt Margery preserved her cast-iron countenance to the end, and even waved her hand like an automaton as the fly drove away.

The only person who gave way to unrestrained weeping was Hannah; but then Hannah was privileged to travel second-class, and sympathizing fellow-passengers discreetly looked another way while she wept. No such license was granted to Bride, seated by her father's side in a first-class carriage, and furtively watched and studied by those cold eyes.

'Decidedly she will do,' he repeated to himself. 'My own cameo-like features and her mother's lovely complexion; hair just the colour that those painter fellows have brought into fashion. Has a good notion of dressing herself, too; that bouquet of pansies looks very well on the soft dark grey. May safely be trusted in the matter of costume, I think—looks as if she would not lose her head about anything.'

Feeling herself silently criticized, Bride kept her feelings well in hand, and refrained

even from stealing a last glance at the old grey tower of the castle. She would do nothing and think of nothing that might tend to destroy her self-control. Sir Bertram, she knew instinctively, would have no mercy on emotion of any kind; and so she valiantly stifled the natural pangs of affection and regret, and preserved an outer calm that gave him a high opinion of her impassiveness.

'Andrew Ormiston is an excellent man,' he said after a pause, 'but singularly unfortunate in his choice of a place of residence. Do you happen to know, my dear, why he fixed upon Seacastle?'

'The Nest was left to him by an old friend,' Bride answered. 'You know, of course, that his voice failed, and he had to give up preaching. Seacastle seemed to him a fitting retreat for a broken-down minister.'

'And I suppose he left the question of drainage to be settled by Providence? I never had the misfortune to smell such a wonderful combination of evil odours in my life. Saltwater mud, decaying vegetable matter, stagnant pools, and other indescribable horrors, filled my bedroom with their pestilential gases. I wonder that you did not have periodical attacks of typhoid fever.'

'I have never had anything but measles,' said Bride.

She knew that his description of the smells of Seacastle was not greatly exaggerated, and yet she felt oddly disposed to stand up in defence of the poor old place. In bygone days she had hated it very bitterly, and had said a thousand times that she longed to escape from it for ever; and now the hour of escape was come, but it was an hour of stifled pain, of unexpressed

regrets, of unsuspected yearnings. Old voices that had once sounded harshly in her ears were softened by increasing distance; old kindnesses, once so lightly regarded, were remembered as mighty deeds of love that could never be duly repaid.

The journey was by no means long, but there was the trouble of changing carriages and shifting luggage before it came to an end; and Sir Bertram grew querulous over the smallest nuisance.

At last, however, the train stopped at a quiet country station, where the most important persons on the platform were two solemn servants in livery. There was a display of obsequious attention on the part of the stationmaster; and then Bride found herself seated in an open carriage by her father's side, going at a brisk pace along a narrow road that went winding through the gloom and glow of the October dusk.

The road wound westward, where Sir Bertram's woods, tawny with autumn gold, rose up against the dull saffron of the sky. It was a lonely country, with patches of heath and solitary cottages here and there; and once there was a passing glimpse of a gipsy encampment, a glow of red cloaks and gay bandanas, and a ring of brown faces round a blazing wood-fire.

The air was heavy and still, yet sweet with the fresh smell of newly turned fields and damp copses. At length the open country was altogether lost to sight, and the woods rose like a dense wall on the right and left, dark and solemn, full of mysterious whispers that seemed to gather force as the dusk deepened. Bride began to sigh for a break in this impenetrable gloom, for just one glimpse of a bit of furzy common or breezy field, or some humble farmhouse where the cocks and hens were going to

roost, and the babies to bed. But there was no break, no change, until the carriage turned in at a wide gate, and passed an ivy-grown lodge, and then at last the house came in view.

A red house with many turrets and oriel windows that revived Bride's childish memories of Hampton Court. Here and there the ivy had asserted its ancient rights, but it was trained and kept in due subjection, and no vagrant tendrils ever straggled and swayed about those heavy stone mullions and shining panes. The flower-beds showed dimly rich in the twilight, and beyond the grounds were vistas of far-reaching sward, stately trees, and gliding shadows; these last were deer, venturing near the mansion under cover of the evening shades.

Father and daughter dined at half-past seven. The dinner was small but choice—

one of those dinners that a man of Sir Bertram's stamp could keenly appreciate; and it put him into an excellent temper with his cook and the whole world.

But Bride, on her part, was quite unmoved by this display of culinary skill, and ate and drank like one in a dream. She was enchanted with the portraits hanging on the old oak-panelled walls, and realized that it is a fine thing to have ancestors. Those gentlemen with pale thin noses, and pointed beards; those ladies in ruffs, with stiff white hands, had all been living, breathing Nettervilles; they had loved (although it seemed impossible that such calm visages could ever have been ruffled by emotion), they had plotted, entering into the spirit of their time; they had grown old and devout, and striven to atone for their sins with prayer and fast. Other Nettervilles, who had left no portraits, had

worn the armour that garnished the hall yonder; there were the morions, once gay with their waving plumes, the breastplates dinted with many a fell stroke. Her thoughts were still busy with these dead-and-gone warriors, when she perceived that the dinner had come to an end.

Sir Bertram withdrew with his daughter into an apartment adjoining the dining-room, and here the coffee and liqueurs were brought by the noiseless servant. This room had been the favourite retreat of the late Lady Netterville, and still went by the name of her boudoir, although it retained few traces of feminine occupation. Quaint old mirrors gleamed on the walls; here and there were cabinet pictures; china monsters and ancient jars and vases filled up every corner and recess. Bright flames, darting round a half-consumed billet, lit up the curious carvings of the oaken mantelpiece,

and shone on the little velvet-covered table that bore the coffee-cups; and Bride, after wandering to the curtained window, came back to the hearth and the firelight.

'You are a little *distrait*, my dear,' said Sir Bertram, leaning back in his chair, and surveying her at his ease. 'Do not indulge in dreamy habits; absence of mind is fatal to one's success in society; there is nothing that people resent more than inattention. But perhaps you are tired.'

'Yes, I am tired,' she admitted quietly.

'Then you must go early to your room. Yours is a face that will soon show signs of fatigue—delicate, clearly cut faces always do. Your buxom beauties are none the worse for a little toning down, but there is no superfluous bloom about the Nettervilles; you must not permit yourself to grow a thought thinner, or a shade paler. A woman should never be too ethereal.'

'No,' said Bride, thinking of Cora Wallace's sumptuous charms.

'That is really a pretty gown that you have on,' Sir Bertram continued; 'those soft sheeny stuffs are becoming to you. But you must have something richer; I know I can trust you in the matter of dress. To-morrow you must go to Highminster and make purchases. There is a good shop where you can get all that you require at present. When we are more settled here, I will take you up to town.'

'I should like to go to town,' said Bride.

'You will come out next season; I shall put you into Lady Emily Swynford's hands. Clever woman; I made her acquaintance at Nice. She contrived to marry her two plain daughters very creditably, and they were really a most unattractive pair of girls. I always felt it to be a pity that such talents as hers were wasted upon them.'

A chill seemed to have fallen on Bride; although the room was warm, she shivered slightly as she rose.

'Good-night, papa,' she said in her quiet voice.

She breathed more freely when she found herself in her bedroom, where Hannah was awaiting her. Here, too, there was fire-light, gleaming on her nurse's grey hair and kindly face—the face of a true friend.

'I must not cry,' said the girl, kneeling down by the good woman's side, and speaking with quiet bitterness. 'The Netterville mustn't shed tears, nor do anything to spoil their complexions. When one possesses chiselled features one has to remember that they will not stand wear and tear. If I had been blessed with a round rosy face and a little snub nose, I might have indulged in a good boo-hoo to-night!'

'But surely my pet has nothing to cry about?' said Hannah, in an anxious tone.

'Oh no. Your pet is to be put into Lady Emily Swynford's hands; Lady Emily has already disposed satisfactorily of some very unsaleable goods, so that she will be sure to get a high price for a first-rate article. Meanwhile the first-rate article must be beautifully dressed up and got ready for display; so, nurse, you will have to go with me on a shopping expedition to-morrow.'

'To Highminster, I suppose,' Hannah rejoined. 'Old Lady Netterville used to buy a great many things there. You are tired to-night, dearie; but to-morrow you will be glad enough to choose your pretty dresses.'

'Yes, I shall be glad enough,' Bride repeated absently. 'But—I wish I could

hear Uncle Andrew say "God bless you, my bairn," before I go to sleep.'

There was nothing to be said in answer to those words. Hannah could only kiss her, and coax her to retire to rest; a little more talking might bring on the much-dreaded fit of weeping.

When the nurse had departed, Bride lay wide awake on her pillow, and watched the ghostly dance of lights and shadows on walls and floor. Here there was a sudden gleam on the brass handles of a Queen Anne chest of drawers; there the lion-claw of a slim-legged table seemed to make a stealthy advance as the firelight touched it. She was not like Eunice Swift, a creature often tormented by the vagaries of a vivid imagination; nevertheless, she caught herself wishing that this stately chamber had been a little smaller and more cosy. Not a single article of luxury was

wanting; every comfort of modern life had been supplied, although the room retained its antique furniture, and even some of the faded needlework of long ago. But, in her depressed mood, Bride could not help sighing for the little bedroom at The Nest, where there was not space enough for the perambulations of a train of ghosts.

After tossing restlessly for a few minutes, she sprang out of bed, and made straight for the oriel window. It was easily unclosed; the cool moist air of the autumn night came stealing in, bringing the scent of wet fern and decaying foliage, and the soft sound of the cropping mouths of deer. There was no moonshine to reveal the beauty of those dim glades; but their fragrance breathed of the wide domains of nature, and reminded her of the fair world that lay outside this formal house. In the sunlight she might take refuge in the park

and the woods, and forget that she was a Netterville.

She went back to her pillow and forgot to watch the dancing shadows in thinking of the sylvan solitudes out of doors. From thinking she glided gradually into dreaming, and slept sweetly till morning.

## CHAPTER V.

### 'CERTAIN FIRST STEPS WERE ACHIEVED.'

THESE grey October days, said by all Londoners to be their dull time, were full of brightness and marvellous vitality to Eunice Swift.

She wondered what they meant by saying that town was empty. The endless procession of men and women, always moving, always pressing on to some unknown goal, had an indescribable charm for one who had lived so long in a narrow sphere. Oxford Street, the 'stony-hearted step-

mother' of De Quincey, was daily trodden by Eunice's eager feet; she preferred to take her exercise with the crowd rather than in the comparative quietness of the squares. Nor was she ever lonely in these daily walks as she went, a silent student of humanity, through a throng of strangers. Like the great opium-eater himself, she felt that 'plain human nature in its humblest and most homely apparel' could interest her and conciliate her affections. A dozen times in the course of a morning's stroll she was pained by wrongs that she could not redress, and woes that she had no power to alleviate; but it was a pain that strengthened and elevated, rather than depressed.

She was working hard in these days, throwing herself heart and soul into her occupations, bringing the freshness of an unworn brain to bear upon all that she did.

Already Mr. Redcliffe was beginning to feel the comfort of this intelligent little companion, who was something more than a mere copying machine; already he found himself growing young again in spirit as he watched her eager pursuit of knowledge, her unwearying delight in literary toil.

Mrs. Densley, too, seemed to revive in the presence of this strong young life, and unconsciously imbibed something of its vitality. Here, in Queen Anne Street, Eunice was no longer the quiet gloomy girl, always chilled by the shadow of Mrs. Goad's grandeur, and always conscious that her father regarded her as the stubborn enemy of family peace. Her real self was coming to the surface at last; the kindness and perfect breeding of her new friends inspired her with confidence; she dared to give her wit full play, and, in short, to be the sunny, lovable creature that nature

had always meant her to be. Very quickly and easily she adapted herself to her surroundings, and fell into all the household ways as if she had never known any other routine. Eager to please, she contrived, somehow, to avoid any of those blunders so often committed by overzeal; and, as Mrs. Densley said, she filled a niche in the house that must have been waiting for her for years.

November set in; but Eunice was too happy to be depressed, even by London fogs. She worked away merrily by gas-light, and then took 'a constitutional' in her bedroom, pacing the floor with light, measured footsteps, and indulging in dreams that were fast shaping themselves into realities. She had to ascend three flights of stairs to her chamber; but what of that? Her room was spacious and airy; there was ample space for all her belongings, and

such light as London can give came freely through two large windows. Here were her old well-used books; her desk, ink, pens, and paper; all the slender stock-in-trade of an author. It was delightfully easy to write now; her thoughts were fresh and sweet, unembittered by resentful feeling and wounded pride. And so the work made speedy progress, and the worker rejoiced in her labour.

As the winter advanced, the fogs cleared away, and the weather brightened. In December, people came straggling back to town; men, who had been shooting on the moors, returned to the lazy luxuries of club-life; women, who were rather tired of rural delights, or seaside philandering, repaired once more to their homes in the 'long, unlovely street' or stately square. Callers became more numerous, and the quiet house in Queen Anne Street was invaded by after-

noon tea-drinkers, mostly pleasant folks enough, fresh from summer tours and full of yachting and travelling experiences. Some of these were writers known to fame; others were artists, whose names inspired Eunice with mingled feelings of awe and delight. But, to use her own phrase, she found them all 'surprisingly easy to get on with.' And they, on their part, went away with the conviction that Mr. Redcliffe's house was livelier than they had ever known it in bygone days. The girl who had sat sullen and mute at the Seacastle parties was becoming a light in town circles, a new voice and a fresh face, destined to be an influence in a larger sphere than Mrs. Goad had ever known.

On Christmas Eve, Eunice, at her bedroom window, was enjoying one of her reveries in the twilight.

It had been a fresh, sunshiny day, and

Mr. Redcliffe had released her from all duties, and sent her out to make Christmas purchases with Mrs. Densley. They had come home in a cab, laden with parcels, and both in high spirits. Even the placid old lady had been stirred to unwonted excitement, and returned with such bright eyes and pink cheeks that her brother paid her an old-fashioned compliment upon her improved appearance. Eunice had bought a little present for Lavinia, and had written her a sisterly letter, full of affection and goodwill. Even Matilda had been remembered in that letter, and the writer's heart was at peace.

She watched the mist thicken, and saw the gas-lamps start up, one after another, out of the gloom of the long street. Then a star appeared above the opposite chimneys; and she thought of evenings gone by when she had sat alone in her attic, and

looked up yearningly to the darkening skies.

The chilled bud of her life had been long in bursting into flower; a thousand times she had said to herself that for her there would never come a time of expansion. She must go to her grave (she had thought) with all her capacities folded and crumpled up like the petals of a rose that lacks the sun.

Eunice had always longed ardently to unfold that inner self of hers; she had, in a vague way, been conscious of a certain richness and sweetness that could be drawn forth only by warm light and soft air. And now the sunbeams were penetrating to the very heart of the rose; the leaves were uncurling and spreading themselves out, and the process was very sweet—so sweet that she could find no words to tell of her delight.

A knock at the door interrupted these

happy musings, and the housemaid looked in.

'If you please, miss,' she said, 'Miss Torwood has called, and asked for you.'

Eunice rose hastily in pleased surprise. She had little expected to meet Angeline again, although some pleasant things had been said about keeping up the acquaintance. It seemed hardly possible, she had thought, that the Torwoods would remember the shabby little woman they had known at Seacastle. Her heart beat faster than usual, and an unwonted flush tinged her cheeks as she ran lightly down the dim stairs. Life was kind indeed; friends were gathering round her; and this wintry Christmas world was surely a sphere of warmth and light.

Angeline was sitting alone in the drawing-room when Eunice entered, coming full into the glow of gas and firelight. At the

sight of her, Miss Torwood almost started, so great was the change that had been wrought in her appearance; so striking was the improvement in dress, carriage, manner. Everything about Eunice had altered, and altered for the better; and yet this transformation had been effected in less than three months. It was marvellous.

'I am glad to see you. It was good of you to come.'

It was the old musical voice, but not quite the old manner. There was a new ring; a new trick of expression. The tone was firmer, and perhaps less plaintive, but just as sweet.

'It is a great pleasure to meet you again,' said Angeline. 'You are looking marvellously well and bright. This new life makes you happy?'

'Very happy.' Eunice's eyes shone. 'It is the greatest pleasure to work for Mr.

Redcliffe. As to Mrs. Densley, she has more than half spoiled me. Fancy my astonishment at finding myself petted!'

'Your good days are only beginning,' sighed Angeline. 'And by-and-by you will make a name. I am trying hard not to envy you.'

'To envy me? Now isn't that too absurd? You must have forgotten the little nobody you met at Seacastle. Think of my old struggle for existence!'

'I do think of it,' Angeline said gravely. 'But I don't see many traces of the past. You cannot realize how greatly you have changed.'

'I am better dressed, that's all,' Eunice answered with her old frankness. 'Yet, no, that isn't all. I'm living the kind of life I always wanted to live; and everybody is good to me.'

'And you have a gift that makes you

independent.' Angeline's voice trembled. 'You are not leaning on others for support, and taking money that doesn't belong to you!'

'No,' said Eunice thoughtfully. 'It is very bitter—that bread of dependence.'

'Bitter, even when it comes freely from a loving hand!'

There was a sadness in the tone that Eunice's quick ear caught at once.

She knew very little of the Torwoods and their history. Once or twice it had been mentioned in her hearing that Captain Torwood was a man of great expectations; but that was all. Of Angeline's means and prospects she had heard absolutely nothing. But it had never even occurred to her to suppose that Miss Torwood was not well provided for. A lady, always well dressed, always moving in good society, must of course be in easy circumstances, she

thought. Her own life had been so simple that she was ignorant of all those devices that make semi-poverty look like affluence.

'I'm a Saturday's bairn,' she said lightly. 'It was decreed that I should work hard for my living. But we must have some pleasant idlers in the world. Society would be dull enough without them.'

'Yes.' Angeline looked dejectedly into the fire. 'But one doesn't like to feel that one can do nothing but smirk and make small-talk.'

There was a brief silence. Eunice was puzzled and surprised.

'Lawrence is in town,' Angeline went on. 'He will call here presently. He has gone to see Aunt Virginia Paisley, and tell her something that she'll be glad to know. I ought to have been glad to know it. But I wasn't ecstatic enough, I fear.'

'Did Captain Torwood expect ecstacies?'

Eunice knew quite well what she was going to hear. She felt as if a cold hand were suddenly laid on her heart.

'I don't know,' said Angeline. 'The truth is that Miss Paisley has lately taken it into her head to get him married. Of course everyone knows that the dear boy has been harmlessly flirting about for years, but never settling on anything. It does seem odd that Aunt Virginia should suddenly issue positive commands, after letting him alone so long.'

'Has he made his choice at last?'

'I think he has; or, rather, he has actually allowed Miss Paisley to choose for him. In the summer she wrote dozens of letters, insisting that he should be introduced to a Miss Devereux, a girl who has five thousand a year. It happened that he was asked for the shooting season to a house where this girl was staying;

and it seems that she really has taken his fancy.'

'Well, that is fortunate, all things considered,' said Eunice quietly.

'I hope it is. But now that Lawrence is really in earnest about marrying, I should like to provide for myself. Unhappily, I have hardly sufficient means even to dress upon, and my brother has always made me an allowance. He has three hundred a year in addition to his pay, and he has been generous, dear boy!'

'But when he is married to his heiress he will surely be more generous still.'

'Ah, that is what I cannot bear to think of. His wife will always feel that there is an encumbrance in the shape of a pauper sister.'

'Are you not misjudging her?' Eunice asked. 'A kind-hearted woman will sym-

pathize with you at once. Do you know Miss Devereux ?'

'I know her slightly. About a year ago she was staying at a watering-place where I had taken up my quarters with some friends. Naturally there were opportunities of studying her, and I think I read her character correctly.'

'She did not quite please you, perhaps ?'

'Well, not quite. But there is nothing flighty or inconstant about her; she is a woman in whom a man may safely trust. On the whole, Lawrence may be congratulated; and yet——'

'And yet what ?'

'She is almost *too* discreet and worldly-wise. And I know she is in the habit of practising little economies for which there is no necessity at all; in fact, her thrift may be said to amount to parsimony. She is just the person to whom a needy sister-in-

law would be a heavy cross, and I want to relieve her of the burden.'

Eunice was silent for a moment. This confidence coming from Angeline surprised her; but then she remembered that Miss Torwood had been perfectly well acquainted with her own unhappy position at Seacastle. It is easy to confide in one who has suffered, and the nature of Eunice's sufferings had impelled Angeline to seek her sympathy.

'But Captain Torwood will himself be rich one day,' she remarked at last. 'It cannot be expected that he will keep the whole of Miss Paisley's fortune.'

'It is expected. But that fortune is yet in the future; and I, for one, have never thoroughly believed in Aunt Virginia's doubtful health. She delights in assuring everybody that her days are numbered, and that her dear nephew will soon inherit all her possessions. It is a whim of hers to be

looked upon as a dying woman; it invests her with a fictitious interest. And it would be a harmless whim if it did not mislead people enough to influence their actions.'

'I understand,' said Eunice, after another short pause. 'You will be happier if you provide for yourself; but you will pain your brother.'

'Better that my dear boy should be pained by my independence than by his wife's innuendoes. He does not know Celia Devereux as I know her; he sees her as an almost faultless woman—beautiful, cultivated, intelligent—all that a man can reasonably desire. Mind, I don't say that he has not chosen well; but he has happened to choose the very girl from whom it would be impossible for me to accept a favour. I can best ensure his comfort by doing without his allowance; that is, I believe, the only thing that is

likely to make discord between his wife and himself.'

The entrance of Mrs. Densley put an end to the *tête-à-tête*. She was followed by the tea-tray; and Eunice began to fill the cups, and talk on everyday subjects, as naturally as if she had always been well acquainted with the world and its ways. Angeline could not help looking at her and silently wondering at her ease and grace.

But although her manner was bright, Eunice was conscious that her inner world was not quite so cloudless as it had been earlier in the day. She refrained, however, from anything in the shape of self-examination; by-and-by there were questions to be asked and answered in stillness and solitude; she must be alone in her room before she ventured to commune with her own heart. Meanwhile she had to carry on a conversation, to pour out tea, and to mount guard

over her nerves lest she should start at the sound of the door-bell. And when at last the ring came, she was able to hear it with admirable composure.

## CHAPTER VI.

'HEAVEN, I THOUGHT, WAS IN HER AIR.'

IN the last light of the winter afternoon, Captain Torwood took his way to Miss Paisley's house n Brook Street.

His betrothed had returned to her rela-ions in town, and he was to dine with her on Christmas Day. It was a curious sensa-ion to be walking about in his old haunts as a newly engaged man, and as he went long Bond Street with his military stride e was not feeling quite so sure of his apture as he ought to have been.

This easy bachelor life of his would soon be only a remembrance. He might revisit old scenes of festivity, and try to call back the pleasures of former days, but they would never present themselves to him in exactly the same guise again. He might amuse himself by trying to play at single blessedness; but it would be a very poor imitation of the real game. There would always be the indisputable facts of a wife and a household, and all the heavy responsibilities and claims that those sacred possessions must necessarily entail.

Yet he could not doubt that he was one of the luckiest men in the world. Celia Devereux was a very pretty girl; she had a look of the Empress Eugenie in her youth. He recalled his first impression of her aristocratic face and tall slight figure as she stood on the terrace of the old country house. Then, too, how charming her

manner was! How well she understood the exquisite art of letting a man know that his attentions were welcome without being too demonstrative! She was, as Angeline had said, a woman who might be safely trusted; never had she been known to descend to the level of vulgar flirtations; every word of hers was well considered; every action was eminently discreet.

He rather feared that Angeline might think her a little too cold; but that was mere nonsense. In his younger days he had always preferred women who were capable of emotions, but such foolish tastes had of course been outlived.

The boy loves a storm; the world-wearied man is enchanted with repose. As to 'intense feeling,' he thought that it was, on the whole, an objectionable thing; passionate attachments ended in wreck; girls who were 'all heart' not infrequently

gave you a good deal of annoyance. A calm sensible woman, with five thousand a year and a fair face, was a prize in the lottery of life, and Lawrence Torwood was the winner of that prize.

Certainly he was as deeply in love as any reasonable man could desire to be. Aunt Virginia was right, quite right; his marriage ought not to be delayed. The longer he waited the less he would desire to part with his liberty. That was natural, he supposed; doubtless every man experienced a few slight pangs of regret when he said a long farewell to a single life. Afterwards, when the knot was securely tied, you accepted your position, and felt that you had done the very best thing that possibly could be done.

But he could not help wishing that his own means were not so contemptibly small. Delightful as it was to marry a girl with a

fortune, it would be still pleasanter to feel that your income was as good as hers. Miss Paisley was a richer woman than Celia Devereux, and Celia was of course aware that her affianced husband was heir to seven thousand a year. Yet although Aunt Virginia, poor dear soul! seemed to be growing more fragile every day, there did not appear to be any immediate danger of her departing this life.

As he turned into Brook Street, he hated himself for these thoughts. They were thoughts that were unworthy of his father's son. Colonel Torwood had not been one of those men whom the world terms saintly; but he had had a horror of everything mean and false, and a devotion to honour and truth. And, just at this moment, there suddenly occurred to Lawrence certain words that the Colonel had spoken shortly before his death.

'I do not wish my boy to be taken into favour by Virginia Paisley,' he had said. 'If she ever relents towards my children, I hope they will not know it till she is dead. The expectation of wealth is often more demoralizing than wealth itself.'

The words were ringing in Captain Torwood's ears as he paused at his aunt's door.

Miss Paisley lived in a cosy house that nestled in between two larger houses, and displayed a daintiness and brightness that put its more stately neighbours to shame. When the door was opened to Lawrence, he found himself at once received into an atmosphere of warmth and luxury. Oriental rugs had been laid down on the richly tiled floor of the hall; flowers in stands were in bloom under the shaded lamplight; and the bland footman led the way upstairs to a sanctum where lights, flowers, and colours were softer and richer still.

Aunt Virginia was sitting, or rather reclining, in a deep armchair, full of satin pillows: a little woman, so small and white and delicate, that you wondered how she contrived to preserve such a frail existence. In her youth she had been a sickly-looking girl, with sandy hair and pale eyes and eyelashes; but at fifty she was not without her attractions. There are women who never learn how to please until they are growing old. Miss Paisley had acquired, late in life, the art of smiling a certain saintly smile, that had wrung positive veneration from the heart of many a hardened worldling. It was a smile that seemed to speak of patience and long-suffering and perfect resignation, and it made you feel almost ashamed of bringing your rude health and spirits into the presence of this gentle invalid. As to that luxurious little boudoir, it had none of the

obnoxious signs of a sick-room. One or two small books of devotion were always placed on a table near the armchair, and the eau-de-cologne flask was ever at hand; but there were no ugly medicine-bottles and pill-boxes. Miss Paisley's decline was the gentle decay of the flower; her light hair, slightly silvered, was smoothly arranged under a charming mob-cap; she wore a rich brocaded gown of costly black, that invested her fragile person with quiet dignity; and, either by accident or design, you were permitted frequent glimpses of a fairy shoe.

'You are a very welcome visitor, dear boy,' she said, holding out a thin little hand. 'I was so delighted to get your letter.'

'I came up only last night,' he answered, seating himself close to her side. 'Do you find yourself any better, Aunt Virginia?'

'I shall never be any better,' she re-

plied, with her patient smile. 'I try not to think about my poor weak self at all; other subjects are far more interesting. I believe I have guessed your good news, Lawrence. It concerns Miss Devereux, does it not?'

'It concerns Miss Devereux very much. You were quite right in saying that I should be charmed with her.'

'But did you let her know that she had charmed you?'

Miss Paisley put the question with some anxiety in her tone, fixing her pale eyes on her nephew's face.

'I have proposed to her, Aunt Virginia, and she has accepted me.'

'Thank Heaven!' ejaculated the invalid, with a sigh of satisfaction. 'Your happiness is secured. It made me quite sad, Lawrence, to see you drifting about in life without any tie to bind you to a home.

You will not always be young and handsome, my dear; there must come a time when girls will cease to be eager for your attentions. By-and-by you will be glad to feel that you can turn to a wife and family.'

'Very true,' said Captain Torwood, really touched by her warm interest in his welfare. 'And I shall always feel that I owe my happiness to your good advice.'

'I knew that Celia Devereux would suit you. She is one of those calm, dignified creatures that a man likes to see at the head of his table. So discreet, too; no horsey tastes, and no betting or flirting propensities. Her mother was a city heiress; but she died when Celia was a mere child, and the dear girl has been trained most carefully by her father's sister, Mrs. Keane. I suppose you have not seen the Keanes yet?'

'No; I am to dine with them to-morrow. Celia has gone back to her house in Eaton Square.'

'They are delightful people, and you will find it easy to get on with them. But Celia is entirely her own mistress; their consent is only a matter of form.'

'She has told me that she is quite free to dispose of herself as she pleases.'

'Altogether it is a most fortunate affair,' said Miss Paisley, closing her eyes as if in silent ecstacy.

Then opening them again, she asked quickly:

'And what does Angeline say about the matter?'

'I saw Angeline this morning, and she said everything that was sisterly and kind. She is staying with Dr. Allanson in Henrietta Street, so that she will have opportunities of getting intimate with Celia.'

'Ah!' said Miss Paisley dubiously, 'I hope the intimacy will do no harm. A sister is often a deadly foe to her brother's betrothed.'

'My dear aunt, what can you mean?' cried Captain Torwood, with indignation. 'Are you afraid that Angeline will poison Celia, or stick a dagger into her breast?'

'Oh no, I am not in fear of any tragedies; engagements may be broken off without the instrumentality of poison or daggers, my dear boy. A woman's tongue——'

'Aunt Virginia, you don't know Angeline in the least! She thinks far more of my happiness than of her own; I never knew anyone so utterly unselfish. Please do not begin to abuse my sister.'

Miss Paisley sighed deeply, and had recourse to the eau-de-cologne.

'A dying woman is not likely to abuse

anybody,' she said meekly. 'I desire to be at peace with the whole world. But I cannot stand harsh words, Lawrence; they shake my poor shattered nerves too cruelly.'

'Forgive me if I spoke harshly,' pleaded Captain Torwood, with a troubled look in his honest blue eyes. 'But if you only knew Angeline's goodness, you would never doubt her for a moment. Celia will be quite sure to love her.'

'Does Miss Devereux know that you make your sister an allowance?' asked Miss Paisley, after a pause.

'Yes.'

'I am glad you have told her; it is much better that she should hear it from you than from others. And now, Lawrence, I hope you will hasten the marriage. Strike while the iron is hot; I hate delays.'

'I do not want any delay, Aunt Virginia.

But Celia, perhaps, will object to being hurried.'

'Nonsense, my dear; no woman objects to the impatience of love.'

Miss Paisley's white face was positively tinged with faintest pink, and her pale eyes seemed to brighten as she spoke. This sudden animation gave her such a look of youthfulness that her nephew surveyed her with astonishment.

'You are young enough to sympathize with her,' he said, smiling, and watching the effect of his words.

'It is by sympathizing that I sometimes renew my youth,' she replied, with one of her soft sighs. 'While we live for others we never grow old.'

The words were so sweetly uttered that Captain Torwood forgot all the hardness of this woman. He did not recall the earlier time when she had had no pity on the

romantic attachment of her sister; nor did he remember, at that moment, her cruel prejudices against Angeline. He saw only the fragile, suffering saint whose last days were brightened by kindly thought for those she was leaving behind.

'I want to see you settled, Lawrence,' she continued. 'I cannot hope to be with you much longer; it would make me very happy to hear you call Celia your wife.'

'Dear Aunt Virginia, I will plead with her,' he said, much moved. 'And I shall bring her to see you often.'

'You will find her easy to persuade; she is a sweet girl, and very much in love. Ah, how fortunate you are!'

Lawrence rose to depart, and held Miss Paisley's atom of a hand with reverent affection. It trembled a little in his clasp, and again that faint pink flush stole up into her face—dear Aunt Virginia, she was full of

tender feeling! He wanted to say something affectionate and grateful; but, like all men of his type, he was slow at making a pretty speech. And while he lingered, the door was flung open, and the bland footman announced 'Mr. Castelle.'

A tall man came quietly into the room, and cast a quick, inquisitive glance at the Captain. Miss Paisley withdrew her hand from Lawrence, and extended it, gently and graciously, to the new-comer.

'Let me introduce my nephew,' she said. 'Captain Torwood—Mr. Castelle.'

The two men exchanged bows; and Lawrence went out, full of wonder and curiosity. Who was this Mr. Castelle? He had a face that was not commonly seen, and there seemed to be something slightly foreign about him. Certainly he was a very handsome person, with aquiline features and heavy-lidded dark eyes; it was an

Italian physiognomy, said Lawrence to himself. The man looked like an artist's model from Rome.

It was dark now; and he must keep his appointment with Angeline in Queen Anne Street. There would be some pleasure in renewing his acquaintance with that little Miss Swift. He hoped that Angeline would settle herself in London near Eunice; the two girls seemed intended by nature and destiny to be close friends.

## CHAPTER VII.

### 'I'M DEEP IN LOVE WI' THEE.'

THEY were still drinking tea when Lawrence entered the old house in Queen Anne Street.

It was a comfortable house although it could not boast of the luxury and elegance of Miss Paisley's home; and everywhere there were tokens of a highly cultured taste which went far beyond Aunt Virginia's superficial refinement. The drawing-room was glowing with cheerful light; Angeline had thrown off her thick mantle, and was

seated, very much at ease, between an old lady and gentleman. Captain Torwood knew something of Mr. Redcliffe by reputation, and looked at him with curiosity and reverence—the reverence that the intelligent idler generally feels for the literary worker. The calm face, deeply graven with lines of thought, and the grand head with its soft white hair, inspired respect at the first glance. Mrs. Densley, with her tranquil air and dainty dress, possessed an old-world charm that harmonized with her ancient china cups and saucers. And as for the young woman who presided over the tea, Lawrence could not help looking at her with a confused notion that she was that little Swift girl mixed up with somebody else.

Had her frock anything to do with this mysterious change in her, he wondered? It was only a velveteen gown of a warm brown shade; but it fitted the slim figure

perfectly, and took rich tints from the dancing firelight. There was a small lace ruffle round her neck, and she wore a knot of gold-coloured ribbon. Long afterwards it astonished him to find that these trivial details remained printed on his memory, while others, more important, had faded and left no trace.

He sat down in a low chair close to her little table, and thought that her eyes, at any rate, were unchanged. Although the lips smiled, there was still the old pathetic look in those dark-grey eyes. It was a look that made him oblivious, for a moment, of the London drawing-room, and carried him back in spirit to the green nook on the old castle-wall. Just for a second or two he lingered in that dreamy atmosphere of golden mist, and felt once more the languid sweetness of the autumn day. So many things had happened since

they had loitered together in their ivy bower!

'I must offer you my congratulations,' said Eunice, handing him a cup of tea. 'Miss Torwood tells me that you are going to be married.'

In an instant the autumn dream vanished. He was the affianced husband of a pretty woman with five thousand a year; and he was deeply in love, of course, and supremely happy.

'Thank you,' he answered, making one acknowledgment suffice for the tea and the congratulations. 'I suppose Angeline has been discussing her own future plans with you. I hope you will persuade her to live in town.'

'She does not need much persuasion. I think she already feels that she wants to mix with the crowd, and make use of her faculties.'

'Make use of her faculties! Ah, she has caught your spirit!'

'It is the spirit of the age. You could hardly expect a woman of your sister's stamp to escape its influence.'

'Oh, she is not of the stuff that workers are made of. Nature has given you a vocation, and therefore you are possessed with the idea that everybody can do something. That is one of the delusions that clever people always indulge in.'

'A truth always looks like a delusion to a prejudiced mind. You have taken up the notion that Miss Torwood can do nothing, and you refuse to believe in her capabilities.'

'But surely I can judge of my own sister's powers!'

'My sisters were not good judges of mine. Nothing blinds the eyes like near relationship.'

'I do not choose that Angeline shall work at anything,' said Lawrence, a little haughtily. 'I have enough for both. She must accept her lot, and continue to be a lazy young woman.'

He had foreseen that something of this kind would be one of the first results of his engagement; there were depths in Angeline's character that he had never sounded, but he had always suspected her of concealing a fund of independence. And certain instincts, half stifled, whispered that Angeline Torwood and Celia Devereux would never be sisters in heart while the world endured. He knew intuitively that Angeline had flown to Eunice for sympathy and advice, and he was disposed to be unreasonably angry with the wise little counsellor.

'Are you quarrelling with Lawrence?' asked Miss Torwood, hearing that a discussion was going on.

'No,' said Eunice, smiling; and then in a lower tone she added: 'I cannot quarrel with anyone for being a good brother. It must be sweet to be cared for, even in an arbitrary fashion.'

In an instant he was back again at Seacastle in the ivy bower. There was just the old look in her face, just the old ring in her voice; and look and voice seemed to speak of an intense loneliness of heart. Her rich fancy and brave spirit might combine to make her independent and strong, but nature had not intended Eunice Swift to be a self-sufficing woman.

'You will soon know what it is to be cared for,' he said, almost bitterly.

At that moment he was conscious of a strange pang—a vague regret for something—he knew not what.

Angeline rose, saying that it was time to go. Captain Torwood said good-bye

rather stiffly to Eunice; but her smile softened him against his will. He wanted to be angry with her for encouraging Angeline in her rebellious ideas; but anger could not live in the light of those pleading eyes of hers. The brother and sister walked to Henrietta Street almost in silence, and Angeline's heart was aching when they paused at Dr. Allanson's door.

'Will you come in, Lawrence?' she asked.

There was a lamp in the doorway, and the light shone down upon his face. He looked grave and almost gloomy, she thought, as she stood awaiting his reply.

'No,' he answered; 'but I will look in to-morrow afternoon. To-night I am going to dine with Hayward.'

'Then I won't detain you longer; it must be past six now. Good-night, dear.'

'Angeline,' he said hurriedly, 'I hope

you have made up your mind to get on with Celia. You must not suppose that—that——'

'That what?'

'That she will wish to alter any of our old arrangements. Things will be as they have always been; my marriage will make no changes that will affect you.'

'Dear Lawrence, of course I know that your heart will always be the same. You are the best of brothers.'

'And Celia will be the best of sisters. Angeline, won't you believe that?'

'I am willing to believe it; but I have not yet proved her.'

'Ah, there is doubt in your tone.'

'Indeed, Lawrence, I think that Celia Devereux will make a good wife; but I do not yet know her intimately. You mustn't expect me to be gushing just at first.'

'You know I hate gush. I hope you are not plotting anything, Angeline?'

'My dear boy, is mine a plotting nature?'

'No; but I am afraid Miss Swift has been putting some absurd ideas into your head. By the way, how is it that you have taken so strong a liking to her?'

'Can we always give a reason for our likings? I find her exceedingly attractive. Are you displeased that I want her for my friend?'

'Displeased? No; she is a good little woman, and—yes, I suppose she has her attractions. Now good-night, my dear, and remember that I insist on knowing all your secret intentions.'

A little later Lawrence and his friend Captain Hayward dined together at their club. It was an excellent dinner, the wine was good, and both these young men were in high spirits. Captain Hayward's uncle,

a patient and long-suffering person, had just paid his nephew's debts, and started him afresh; and the nephew was in that state of gratitude, repentance, and hilarity which is commonly felt on such occasions. Then, too, he beheld his friend's prospects in such a brilliant light, and congratulated him so warmly on his engagement, that Captain Torwood was confirmed in his opinion of his own good fortune.

His mood was, perhaps, a trifle more sober as he dressed for the family dinner on Christmas Day. It is always a trying ordeal to appear before a girl's friends for the first time as her accepted lover. And when the girl is an heiress, and the lover a comparative pauper, all the stiffness and awkwardness are painfully intensified. Until he had won Miss Devereux, Lawrence had never realized how poor he actually was; and he found himself chafing

at his small means as he had never chafed before.

He had had to buy her a ring, and had come away from the jeweller's shop disgusted with his purchase. It was, he thought, about forty guineas cheaper than it ought to have been, and would look contemptible among the splendid possessions of his promised bride. In vain did common-sense argue that Miss Devereux would prize the gift for the giver's sake, and that love asks nothing more costly than love. When he examined his poor little offering he despised the modest glimmer of its pearls, and felt a desperate inclination to pitch it out into the street.

Meanwhile Miss Devereux herself was feeling a little less composed than usual. She was of a calm temperament, and it was the first time that anything like a genuine attachment had disturbed the quiet of her

inner life. Offers had come to her of course, but not one of them had been good enough to tempt her to resign her freedom; and now, at five-and-twenty, she had suddenly made the discovery that she possessed a heart.

She was dressed for dinner, and had dismissed her maid; but she still lingered over her bedroom fire in a thoughtful mood. Mrs. Keane, coming in to say a few unimportant words, found her sitting in a low chair, with one foot on the fender, and her hands clasped round her knee.

It was almost startling to see Celia Devereux in anything approaching an unconventional attitude. All her usual postures were stately, and perhaps a little stiff; even in her schooldays she had seldom been reproved for the lolling and lounging ways in which many girls delight to indulge. She had always sat bolt up-

right in church and at class-time, and had been constantly pointed out as a model of deportment to her ease-loving companions.

To Mrs. Keane, who had watched over her from childhood, there was something significant in this unwonted pose. If Celia had abandoned herself to languid dreaming over the fire, she must be very much in love; and her aunt had never believed her to be capable of anything stronger than a mild and decorous liking.

'You are looking very well in that gown, my dear,' said Mrs. Keane pleasantly. 'I like the combination of ivory colour and crimson. Does Captain Torwood criticize ladies' dress?'

'I think he notices everything; but I have not had time to find out his tastes yet,' Celia replied.

She blushed faintly as she spoke, and

then unclasped her hands, and took her foot from the fender.

'I had a nice talk with Miss Paisley the other day,' Mrs. Keane remarked. 'What a sweet fragile creature she is! Evidently passing away very fast.'

'Of course we are sure that she has only a short time to live. And she is so calm, and so ready for her end, that one admires her goodness,' said Celia piously. 'But it would be quite too nice if she could stay on earth.'

Mrs. Keane was quietly amused. She understood her niece perfectly, and knew that Celia would always keep up a decent little fiction of regret for Aunt Virginia, even in the presence of her nearest relations. And, on the whole, Mrs. Keane respected Celia for her fictions; at any rate, they were better than the brutal candour with which some men and women deal with

a death that they anxiously desire. Yet she knew that if Miss Devereux had been less certain of Aunt Virginia's approaching demise, Captain Torwood would hardly have prospered in his wooing.

'She is fonder of him than she has ever been of anyone,' Mrs. Keane said to herself. 'But I believe she would have conquered her feelings if there had been no chance of his getting Miss Paisley's fortune. She could not permit herself the luxury of marrying a poor man.'

'Are you satisfied with Maria?' she asked, suddenly changing the subject of conversation.

Maria was Celia's new maid, and it was whispered among Miss Devereux's intimate friends that her maids were changed very often.

'Well, not entirely,' Celia rejoined, with more animation than usual. 'She is so

very wasteful; I never saw anybody use such a quantity of thread. And then, too, she breaks an incalculable number of needles, and literally strews the floor with pins.'

'Very trying,' murmured Mrs. Keane, in a sympathizing tone.

'Very trying,' repeated Celia, rising and giving a last look at herself in the Psyche.

There was no reason to be dissatisfied with the figure that was reflected in the glass. It looked, perhaps, a little too much like a beautifully dressed image of Dresden china; but china is very pretty in its way, and what would a drawing-room be without it?

The ladies went downstairs, and very soon afterwards Captain Torwood was announced. The Keanes received him with benignity, and Celia's fair face greeted him with a serene smile. He was favourably

impressed with her uncle and aunt; they were as pleasant a pair of elderly worldlings as could be met with in Vanity Fair: calm, genial, and sweet as summer.

The dinner was good; the wine first-rate; and the courting after dinner was made as easy as possible. Lawrence and Celia had the cosy back drawing-room to themselves, and although there were only half-drawn curtains between them and the guardians, they were left entirely to their own devices.

It was all perfectly smooth and delightful, and yet Lawrence found it a little difficult to sustain a conversation with his betrothed. Most unaccountably, his thoughts wandered more than once from this calm smiling face to another woman's face, with irregular features and pathetic eyes. When Celia dropped her little remarks in a thin treble voice, he recalled a certain contralto,

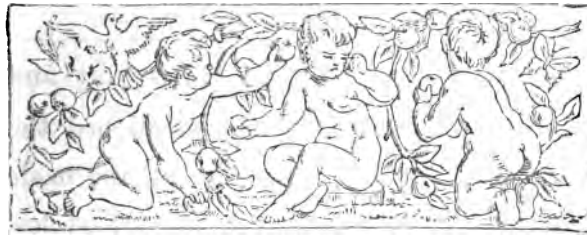
full, yet often tremulous in its tones; and then he wondered at himself, and instantly devoted all his energies to the task of entertaining the maiden by his side.

People had always spoken of Miss Devereux as an intelligent woman, and it is certain that she believed in her own powers of mind to a very great extent. She subscribed to Mudie's, and read all the popular books of biography and travel, finding it easier work to get through them than to toil through the novels. Fiction she could neither appreciate nor understand; it appealed to a faculty that she did not possess, for she was utterly wanting in imagination. But she could store up hard facts, and bring them out when occasion called for them; and a good many of her friends spoke of her as being very intellectual indeed.

Having got through the requisite amount of spooning, Captain Torwood and his

affianced bride began to discuss art and literature. Miss Devereux mentioned the names of several leading painters, and made her comments upon their various styles. She produced her portfolio, and her lover had the privilege of examining sundry drawings in water-colours, which owed their finishing-touches to her master. A little bored by this exhibition, he begged her to come to the piano, and kept her there till it was time to take his leave.

And then they parted, and he went out into the frosty night-air, and drew a long breath of relief. Certainly he was the happiest of men, and she was the most perfect of women; but freedom is sweet, and he lit his cigarette with a faint sigh for the liberty that he must so soon resign.



## CHAPTER VIII.

'SPEAK, MY FAIR, AND FAIRLY, I PRAY THEE.'

WHILE Captain Torwood was devoting himself to the duties of courtship, his sister Angeline was pondering anxiously over the changes that his marriage must bring. In spite of all his affectionate commands, her resolution to support herself remained unshaken; she would not pain him by talking about her plans, she thought, but she would carry them out quietly, trusting that time and good sense would soften his objections.

Meanwhile, the Christmas world was by no means a gay world to her troubled spirit, and her friends said that she looked pale and grave.

The Allansons were a quiet couple. Soon after the birth of her second child, Mrs. Allanson's health had begun to fail, and there was now little hope of any return of vigour. She was a woman of a gentle nature, and accepted her fate with outward calmness; yet her husband knew that she suffered much in secret. To know that she might live perhaps as long as any of the healthy people around her, was not a very great consolation. Life without the power of usefulness seemed but a poor possession to Mrs. Allanson, and she was often tempted to wish that she might pass quickly away from a world in which she could no longer play an active part.

But, for her husband's sake, it was best

that she should live. His was one of those rare natures which are incapable of producing more than one love in a lifetime. It was better, she knew, that he should cherish this poor blighted plant, rather than mourn over its uprooting.

Moreover, he was a prosperous man, and his beloved invalid could be surrounded with luxuries. Grave and quiet always, the stillness of the household did not depress him as it would undoubtedly have depressed a man of gayer temperament, and he was contented with his lot. But the quietness that was peace to him could hardly be said to agree so well with the two healthy little girls in the nursery.

The elder was nearly eight years old, an age that demands a good deal of amusement and attention. She was beginning to make claims that the poor weak mother was wholly unfit to meet, and had sometimes

complained pretty loudly of mamma's inability to tell stories and explain hard lessons. An exacting young person was Miss Helen Allanson; imperious, impatient, yet not insensible to good influence. Her father, entirely engrossed by his love for his wife, and concern for her health, was unable to judge quite fairly of the requirements of a lively, high-spirited child, and Nelly was occasionally rebuked with more sternness than her faults deserved.

To this little girl the coming of Angeline Torwood had been a positive blessing. Angeline had a head well stored with tales, an even temper, and a strong constitution. She could enjoy a nursery tea without afterwards paying the penalty of a headache, and could even endure being hugged and sat upon without a murmur. Such a person was a valuable acquisition to the quiet household, and the children had

already avowed a decided intention of keeping her for ever and ever.

But although the little ones found her as cheerful as usual, Angeline's spirits were sinking fast when the day was closing in. Last Christmas was haunting her with its pleasant memories; then, Lawrence had been staying with her at an old house far away in the country, and his marriage with Miss Devereux was an utterly undreamed-of event. A hundred times, as the tears rose to her eyes, she accused herself of being selfish and unjust. She had always hoped that he would marry one day, and now that the day was really drawing near, she shrank from its approach. If only he had fixed on somebody else—on anybody in the world but Celia Devereux!

With a slower step than usual she went downstairs to the warm little drawing-room. It was half-past six; the dinner-

hour was seven, and she knew that she should find the doctor sitting in a low chair near his wife's couch, and talking in his wonted soft tones. Just then poor Angeline could almost have found it in her heart to envy Mary Allanson. The invalid had a place to fill in the world; but for Angeline there seemed to be no place at all.

'We have been speaking of you, Angeline,' said Mrs. Allanson, in her weak, pleasant voice. 'Come here, please, and sit close to my sofa; I have something very important to say.'

The doctor rose and gave his seat to Miss Torwood. She sat down, trying to smile and look interested; her hostess was kind always, and she honestly wanted to keep her own wretched restlessness and dissatisfaction out of sight. Not for one moment did she believe that Mary Allanson had anything of importance to communicate;

there was, perhaps, some pleasant little scheme for the amusement of the guest; some bright surprise that husband and wife had been planning together.

'We are dull creatures, Edward and I,' said the doctor's wife, smiling; 'so dull that we want a sunny person to take up her abode with us altogether. Will you stay, dear Angeline, and be all to my poor children that I cannot be? We have set our hearts on keeping you always.'

Angeline, in her glad surprise, was silent for a moment, and the colour rushed into her pale face. She had looked forward to months of anxious thought, and lo! all her perplexity had suddenly found an end. Her words did not come readily, and her voice trembled when she spoke.

'I shall be very glad to stay,' she answered. 'In fact, I meant to try to do something—to provide for myself, in short.

Lawrence's marriage will make a great difference to me.'

'We thought so,' remarked the doctor quietly. 'It is a very good thing for us that you are willing to remain. We all know that we have got a treasure.'

'And I think Lawrence will not be angry now,' said poor Angeline, with a sigh of relief. 'He could not bear to hear of my little schemes of independence; but indeed I cannot let him make me an allowance after he is married. His wife would always look on me as a burden that she had accepted for his sake. It would be too hard and humiliating.'

'But she is rich,' said Mrs. Allanson.

'And, like many rich people, she clings to her money,' rejoined the doctor. 'I know something of Miss Devereux, and, on the whole, I think Angeline is right.'

So the day that had had a dark dawning

ended in gratitude and peace; and Angeline went to her rest a happy woman. Meanwhile, in Eaton Square, two ladies were making her the subject of a confidential conversation. Captain Torwood had gone his way, and Mrs. Keane and her niece were talking in low voices over the drawing-room fire.

'So he is in haste to marry,' said Mrs. Keane, with her motherly smile. 'Well, that is not surprising, of course. And are you going to yield to his entreaties?'

'I don't know,' Celia answered gravely. 'It would be better, perhaps, to wait till——'

The eyes of the elder lady twinkled, but she did not attempt to come to her niece's assistance.

'Till dear Miss Paisley is no more,' continued Celia with an effort. 'You know, Aunt Laura, that Angeline Torwood is

dependent on her brother. It is a pity; but one must accept her, I suppose.'

'Of course you must accept your husband's relations,' said Mrs. Keane, showing a little more feeling than usual. 'My husband was generous to my brother —your father, Celia.'

'I know papa was not rich before he married mamma,' Celia replied calmly.

'Your mother had a heart; she gave herself and her fortune to the man of her choice,' Mrs. Keane went on. 'I don't believe she ever regretted her love-match. She did not live long, poor thing, but that short life of hers was happy.'

'I have always heard of her happiness,' said Celia. 'But I do not think I am as romantic as she was, Aunt Laura. It seems to me that a fortune should wed a fortune.'

'And your mother thought that a heart

should wed a heart. I see you are far wiser than she was, my dear.'

'I believe I have a great deal of common-sense,' said Celia complacently.

'I am sure that you have. You really don't need any advice or guidance; I do not know any girl who can take care of herself as well as you can. Good-night, dear child; I am a stupid old woman, and I always get sleepy after ten.'

And Mrs. Keane aroused her dozing husband in his armchair, and quickly betook herself upstairs to her own room.

'What do you think of Captain Torwood, Anthony?' she asked, when the chamber-door was closed.

'Nice gentlemanly fellow,' replied Mr. Keane, with a yawn. 'Celia is very sweet on him, isn't she?'

'She is sweet on him in her discreet and cautious fashion.'

'As fond of him as she can be of anybody?'

'Yes, but her fondness is a very cold thing. That girl is made of wood all through. She loves nothing so well as her money.'

'I always said that she would bury us all with the greatest composure,' remarked Mr. Keane placidly. 'But she really seems to have taken a fancy to Torwood, and she can afford to indulge her fancy, just as her mother did.'

'Don't compare her with her mother! When I think of that generous, warm-hearted woman, I am amazed at the daughter's hard nature.'

'Is the marriage to come off soon?' asked the uncle, with another yawn.

'Heaven only knows! I suspect that she will keep the engagement daundering on till Miss Paisley dies.'

'Well, Laura, there is no need for you to get excited about the matter. For my part, I feel surprised to find her going in for a romantic love-match; but it does not look so romantic if there is a certainty of Miss Paisley's fortune in the background. Captain Torwood has played his cards very well—so well that I fancy the wooing will not be long a-doing.'

'He knows very little of the maiden of his choice,' said Mrs. Keane, with most unwonted bitterness. 'He thinks he has got a sweet pliant creature who will let him have the entire control of herself and her five thousand a year. By-and-by he will be astonished to find that he cannot influence her in the least, and he will be not a little surprised at her strict economy.'

'Go to sleep, Laura,' said Mr. Keane, in a tone of quiet authority. 'You have done

your duty to your niece, and she is off your hands. As to Torwood, he is old enough to know that husbands always do make astounding discoveries. Good-night, my dear.'

Angeline had promised her brother that she would call upon Miss Devereux without delay; and on the day that followed Christmas she duly performed her vow. She could take her way now to Eaton Square with a heart free from despondency; and Lawrence's betrothed should know that his sister would be no burden to anyone. Angeline was in excellent spirits; she could be civil and even affectionate to Celia in this happy consciousness of independence. And she was too much a woman of the world to make her communication with any lack of grace.

Celia received her with a gracious formality which instantly set up a little barrier

between them. In her heart of hearts Miss Devereux had quietly resolved that there should not be too much familiarity between her sister-in-law and herself. She was very much in love with Lawrence, and meant to make him an irreproachable wife; but Angeline must be kept at a certain distance. It was only too probable that she was an encroaching girl, who would expect to have her travelling expenses paid, and be looking out for presents. Anyhow, it was hard enough that Lawrence should make her an allowance; no doubt he was absurdly liberal, but Celia hoped to correct his views after marriage.

'Shall you stay long in town?' she asked, with her frosty smile. And while she spoke, her eye travelled slowly over Angeline's figure, appraising every article of her dress. Certainly Lawrence had been ridiculously generous; his sister's paletôt

was bordered with expensive fur, and her gown was of no cheap material.

'I am going to live in Henrietta Street,' Angeline answered, understanding the glance very well, and resenting it in a silent fashion. 'I have decided to remain with my friends the Allansons, and undertake the education of their little girls.'

'Oh, really! That will be very nice indeed.'

'Yes; it is a most satisfactory arrangement. Lawrence has ever been the best of brothers, but I shall be off his hands now. The Allansons are very liberal; I shall have no need of any other help.'

'Everyone must admire your independent spirit,' said Celia, quite cordially. 'I have always thought it a noble thing for a woman to support herself.'

'I believe the working women are the happiest,' Angeline rejoined quietly.

'Of course they are. And dear Lawrence will thoroughly appreciate your unselfishness.'

'Not so thoroughly as you do, I am afraid,' Angeline said, smiling. 'He has set himself against this independent spirit of mine. But I am sure I may rely on your influence.'

'Yes, indeed,' Celia replied with evident sincerity. 'I shall make him see the matter in the right light. Men are nearly always more unreasonable than we are; but a good sensible talk will overcome all his objections.'

'Then you don't think it will be at all difficult to manage him?' remarked the sister, with a gleam of amusement in her eyes.

'Not at all. Miss Paisley says he has plenty of common-sense and amiability, and has listened very willingly to her advice.

He will always know that I am anxious only for his good; I never fail to see my duties clearly,' said the heiress, in a solemn tone.

Angeline wondered whether Lawrence would see that it was his wife's duty to direct his conduct! A man who has been a bachelor for more than thirty years is not always found to be amenable to feminine authority. And it even seemed possible to the sister, who knew her brother well, that he would submit more readily to the influence of a woman less calmly correct, less certain of her own perfections than Celia Devereux.

But Celia was the woman of his choice, and Angeline was quite ready to scold herself for not liking her better. She was conscious of a sense of relief when Mrs. Keane entered the room, and began to talk and smile with her usual sunny pleasant-

ness. And then Miss Torwood departed with a dreary sense of having done her duty, and went home gratefully to the comfortable house in Henrietta Street, and the companionship of Mrs. Allanson and the children.

A little later, Lawrence and his fair ladye were again seated in the back drawing-room together. He had been calling on Miss Paisley, and had listened to the gentle invalid's counsels as patiently as usual. Of course she was right; he must bring Celia to a speedy decision about the marriage. There was nothing to wait for; and it was clear that Celia loved him quite well enough to forget that he had only the prospect of a fortune instead of a fortune itself.

It might be whispered that a bird in the hand was worth two in the bush; but then the birds in the bush were simply waiting

tamely for his grasp. Aunt Virginia was evidently getting weaker and weaker; her colour came in hectic flushes and then faded suddenly; her voice often sank to a whisper. But while he was mentally enumerating these symptoms a sudden sense of degradation stung him sharply. Was he verily his father's son? Was not this the very kind of demoralization that the brave, high-principled soldier had dreaded for his only boy?

'Your sister called this afternoon,' said Celia, breaking the momentary silence between them. 'She has a sweet manner, Lawrence; my aunt was quite charmed with her.'

'I am glad you like Angeline,' he answered, with a brightening face.

'Oh yes; I always knew that she was a general favourite. She was staying at Ryde with the Mordaunts when I met her

first. It is decided, she tells me, that she is to live in Dr. Allanson's family.'

'That is news to me,' Captain Torwood said quickly. 'But Mrs. Allanson has been her intimate friend for years; they will get on very well together. In fact, Angeline can always get on with anybody.'

'I can quite believe that she is charmingly easy to live with. Mrs. Allanson is very fortunate in having secured her services.'

'Her services! Good heavens, Celia, what an extraordinary expression!'

Miss Devereux at once perceived that she had made a blunder. Like most intensely self-confident women, she was deficient in tact, and she now saw, too late, that her lover's pride was up in arms. Yet it displeased her that he should look and speak with such haughtiness; surely a man ought always to order himself lowly

and reverently to a woman who had five thousand a year.

'Of course I only meant the highest and most useful of all services,' she said impressively. 'Angeline has consented to educate Dr. Allanson's children. It will be a happy and interesting occupation.'

'Happy and interesting fiddlestick! I will not have my sister turning herself into a governess.'

'I think you are wrong, Lawrence, to raise objections. I told her that I thoroughly approved of her sensible conduct.'

'Well, we will not discuss the matter,' he said, still speaking loftily. 'I shall talk to Angeline, and bring her to reason.'

'It is somebody else who ought to be brought to reason,' remarked Celia, laying her hand upon his coat-sleeve, and looking down complacently on the engagement-ring that glistened on one of her white fingers.

She tried to speak in a sportive tone, but nature had never intended her to be sportive. Still, she was looking pretty at the moment, and that glance at the ring did not pass unnoticed by Captain Torwood. It gave him an opportunity which he was quick enough to seize at once.

'When will you let me put on another ring?' he asked, taking possession of her left hand, and pressing it fondly.

'Oh, I don't know; one doesn't want to wear too many,' she answered, blushing, and pretending not to understand him.

'Nonsense,' he said, drawing her closer to him. 'I mean to have a decided answer this very moment. Celia, darling, when are we going to be married?'

Notwithstanding her secret and firm determination to rule, there was something very winning in this masterful way of his. Moreover, his arm was round her waist,

and his golden moustache brushed her cheek. Celia was beginning to feel herself conquered; but yet——

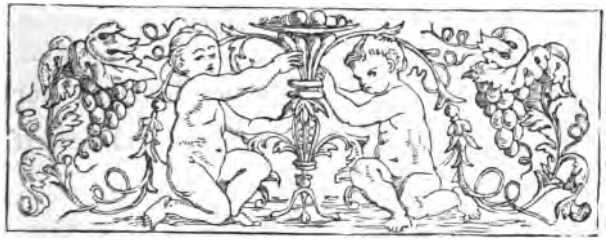
'We have been engaged only a little while. There has been hardly time enough for us to know each other thoroughly,' she murmured.

'We know quite enough to be sure that we are suited,' he said tenderly. 'Are you afraid of being disappointed in me by-and-by?'

'Oh no.'

'Then why will you not give me a definite answer? You are really too cruel, love.'

But the reproach was softened by a kiss; and Celia, in the weakest moment that she had ever yet known, was heard to whisper something that sounded like 'early in the new year.'



## CHAPTER IX.

### 'SHE IS SO SELF-ENDEARED.'

THERE is a day that is photographed on Eunice Swift's memory. Other days come and go, joys and sorrows crowd into her life, but they never blot out the picture of that day.

The month is January, the time is afternoon, and she feels that she is removed farther than ever from her old life. She is in the swim. Her book has proved to be a veritable success. It is pronounced witty,

quaint, original; just the kind of book to captivate *blasé* minds. And *blasé* minds are plentiful enough in nurseries, as well as in drawing-rooms and clubs.

Eunice's book was intended for the nursery; but fashionable fathers and mothers seized upon it with delight. It showed them themselves and their follies in a new light, and they thoroughly enjoyed the exhibition. Anything in the shape of a looking-glass is hailed with joy by a humanity that is never sated with self-contemplation. And it was a kindly hand that held up the mirror.

In the Fine Arts Society's rooms in Bond Street there is a select gathering of literary, artistic, and fashionable people. They are drawn together by a collection of rare articles of *vertú*, and a few choice pictures.

Mr. Redcliffe, looking worn and feeble,

is here, with Eunice by his side. And Mrs. Densley is here too, feeling a quiet triumph in her young friend's success. Everyone is gracious to Eunice, and she is grateful to everybody. But somewhere in a remote corner of her heart there is a spot that aches.

'They are to be married early this year,' she says to herself again and again. She knows it must be true, for Angeline has said it. Of late, fortune has bestowed her gifts with a liberal hand. Hidden deep in Eunice's soul there has always lurked a love of dress. She has never ceased to cherish a desire for rich soft silks, draped by artistic hands; for perfect little gloves, and shoes that are models of French skill. And she does find immense satisfaction in the garments that she wears to-day.

She is standing before a glass case of rare old fans talking to a man who has

already done her good service, and will do more yet. He has a keen well-cut face, lined and worn as the faces of literary men are wont to be. Mr. Kennard has never written a novel in his life; but no man can better appreciate those delicate lights and shades of thought that a true novelist displays. Eunice likes him, and is grateful for all the kind things that he has said and written of her.

She wanders in the middle of a sentence, and recovers herself with an effort. He looks at her, and then quietly follows the direction of her eyes.

They are entering the room together—a tall, martial-looking man with a golden moustache, and a lady, tall also. She has never in her life seen Celia, but she knows her at the first glance.

Most women are able to recognise their rivals by instinct. Eunice has been trying

hard to be good and placid and indifferent. But at the first sight of the heiress she is conscious of a wicked little thrill, that makes her quiver down to the tips of her fingers.

'I hate her,' she says inwardly. 'No, I don't. I hate myself, my nasty contemptible self! I didn't think I was going to be quite such a fool as this.'

The betrothed pair approach, and Eunice resolutely stands her ground. Mr. Kennard does not move away. He looks on quietly, and sees everything.

Captain Torwood drawls more than usual, and is very lazy and slow. He begs to introduce Miss Devereux, and then the two women stand confronting each other, and Mr. Kennard watches them with a twinkle of amusement in his eyes.

Eunice calmly returns Miss Devereux's supercilious gaze. It is with positive

delight that she detects all Celia's weak points at once, and never forgets one of them to the end of her days. With the swiftness of a lightning-flash she criticizes face, figure, costume, and audaciously decides that she is the better-dressed woman of the two.

Her furs are not half so costly as those which Miss Devereux wears; but she has an air of sumptuousness that the heiress never attains. Celia's poverty of nature reveals itself somehow in her attire. She moves stiffly, her gowns never fall into those easy folds which depend on the wearer as well as on the dressmaker. In spite of all that can be done, she gives an impression of leanness. There is a little pinched frosty look about her that suggests needless austerities.

Eunice, slim as she is, has a roundness and suppleness of form. Every movement is free. Her gait is firm and unconstrained;

her foot is that of a girl of Seville. Even in the old days, Captain Torwood had perceived her little graces. But as he looks at her to-day, he wonders more and more at the changes that a short time has wrought.

He wonders too, not a little, at himself. There is something in Eunice that appeals to something within him, and wins a swift response. He likes this new look of dainty prosperity, and yet he feels that the little teacher in the shabby frock must have crept very close to him unawares. Miss Swift, gay, self-possessed, and successful, is decidedly farther away. He would like to bring her nearer if that could possibly be done. But how can it be done with Celia standing by his side?

She is dressed from head to foot in black. Whether it be silk or satin he is unable to decide, but it is sheeny to the eye and soft

to the touch. There is a good deal of dark brown fur about her, and a cluster of yellow chrysanthemums is fastened near the throat. Eunice is one of those women who cannot exist without flowers; she always manages to get them at all seasons. In these winter days they come from divers quarters, and she makes the most of anything in the shape of a blossom. Those delicate yellow things, nestling on the dark fur, captivate Lawrence Torwood's fancy at once.

'Your flowers make one forget that it is winter,' he says, with approval in his glance.

'Do they? To me they are a reminder of the season,' she answers. 'Pale scentless things, only valued because there is nothing else to be had.'

'But they are very pretty,' Miss Devereux condescends to remark.

'Pretty when they have no rivals near

them—pretty while the roses keep out of sight. Dr. Johnson used to say that he had never had as much wall fruit as he wanted, and I have never yet had my fill of roses. I should like to wade through them, as the old Romans did when they went to their feasts.'

'How you must regret Seacastle and its flowers!' says Captain Torwood, not sorry to remind her of the past.

'No.' She gives him a frank look. 'The Seacastle flowers were for "other hands than mine." Ours was an unromantic little kitchen-garden, full of carrots and cabbages. There wasn't even a pumpkin in it to remind me of Cinderella.'

'But other people had plenty.'

'Oh yes. Mrs. Goad had thousands. But I should have been sentenced to five years' penal servitude if I'd taken one.'

'Couldn't you enjoy your friend's

flowers without wanting to gather them ?' Celia asks the question with a slight touch of rebuke in her tone. She is rather fond of administering lady-like rebukes.

'Mine is an acquisitive nature,' owns Eunice, with a gleam of fun in her grey eyes. 'Of course I know it's wicked to want all the things I like for my very own. But I always do. It torments me to see roses that I mustn't touch. I went to a floricultural show once, and suffered agonies.'

'It must be very unpleasant, I should think, to have such unruly feelings,' says Celia icily.

'It is—very unpleasant. It makes one feel so dreadfully inferior to all the people who have well-regulated desires. And yet I fancy I should find life too uninteresting if I had no cravings. To be like Jack Horner, sitting in his corner, pulling plums

out of his pie would be slow work. It's almost too easy to be good when you have all that you want in your lap, isn't it ?'

Captain Torwood smiles, and flushes slightly. Can it be possible that Miss Swift is hinting at a faint resemblance between Jack Horner and his betrothed ?

Now that he thinks about the matter, he finds that Celia certainly is a little like that celebrated nursery prig. She has no need to go about coveting other people's plums, with such a well-filled pie of her own. And then the irreproachable goodness !

Celia herself is puzzled by this young person's eccentric talk, and regards her with a cold suspicion. Where did Lawrence pick her up ? She does not like the intimacy, and means to discourage it. Quite aware that Miss Devereux has had enough of her, Eunice turns to Mr. Ken-

nard, and the lovers occupy themselves with the case of fans.

They begin with a fan that belongs to the early days of Louis the Fourteenth. The painter had depicted him as Endymion sleeping on Mount Latmos, while La Vallière, as Diana, descended from a flowery chariot. Miss Devereux looks with mild interest at poor Louise, with the well-known curly rings upon her forehead, and says she supposes that it must be a good likeness.

'No doubt of it,' says Captain Torwood absently.

'Do you think La Vallière could have been a beauty, Lawrence?' she asks.

'Hardly,' giving his mind to the subject. 'Pretty light hair and a white skin, I believe. De Montespan, too, was very fair. The Grand Monarque had the good taste to prefer blonde women.'

Celia smiles quietly. Eunice Swift is dark-haired and somewhat sallow.

'Let us get on to the pictures,' she says, making towards another room. 'I want to see Mr. Minto. He is sure to be here. What a grand painter he is!'

'He has done some wonderfully fine things.'

'I can see him now, Lawrence. The tall man, sunburnt. He is actually talking to that little woman we met a minute ago,' says Celia, with a slight projection of the lower lip. 'That Miss—I didn't catch the name—aims at being original, I think.'

'She *is* original.' He has seen that little grimace. 'She has written a successful book, and people are running after her.'

'Oh, really! Is she well connected, and that sort of thing?'

'I don't know much about her connections. We met her last year at a quiet

little village. She and Angeline are great friends.'

'Ah, she is a friend of Angeline's! Well, I dare say she is clever; but I thought there was something odd about her dress.'

'She is exceedingly well dressed.'

'I don't admire that style myself. And isn't there something funny in her manner?'

'She has a very good manner, I think.'

His tone is cold and quiet. But Celia is not the woman to take warning.

'Do you? Now I thought she had too much dash,' she goes on. 'People of low origin often get a dashing air when they are noticed in society.'

'I am not acquainted with many people of low origin. Perhaps you have studied their ways more than I have,' he says, drawling.

'Oh dear no!' Celia speaks loftily. But I am very quick in detecting the

slightest sign of vulgarity. 'I never can like a woman who is not *perfectly* refined! And one can't be too particular in making acquaintances.'

He is silent.

'We are stamped by our associates.' She *will* talk on in that oracular voice of hers. 'Perhaps I am rather too exclusive. But society is getting so mixed nowadays that one must draw the line somewhere. I dare say Angeline isn't quite so cautious as I am.'

A dark cloud is gathering over Captain Torwood's handsome face; yet Celia is blind as well as deaf. It would have been sweet to swear; but that simple form of relief is denied him.

'Angeline is not likely to make mistakes,' he says. 'She has her instincts.'

Celia, in her frigid way, is already jealous of Miss Torwood. And Lawrence

believes too much in her! He is a little stubborn sometimes, she thinks.

'I don't care about knowing new people,' she remarks. 'Your sister's ideas are more liberal than mine. I like to be satisfied that a person has an assured position before I am in the least intimate. So, Lawrence, you must not expect me to take up all Angeline's dear friends.'

Captain Torwood had always been looked upon as a sweet-tempered man, indolent, and slow to wrath. But if any of his old comrades had seen his face at that moment, they would have been startled at the flash of rage that deformed it. It was such impotent rage, too! He could not say or do anything to a woman; and she was the woman who had promised to be his wife.

He had an intense horror of scenes of any kind. Their two lives had to be spent together, and he must make the best of

Celia Devereux. Nothing should ever induce him to bandy reproaches with a girl who must be his daily and hourly companion for years to come. Yet he *must* make her understand that he is no slave.

They are standing side by side before one of those pictures of love and summer which artists are never weary of painting, and people are never tired of seeing. Leafy shade and golden sunshine; a stream; a man and a girl in a boat gliding on among water-lilies. In his present mood, Lawrence thinks that the painter must have been a fool to depict those two idiots, simpering into each other's eyes. Men have got to make love, of course; it is a part of the necessary business of life; but there is no reason why they should be represented in the act of making it. His own face certainly is not lover-like at this moment, nor is there any ring of tenderness in his tone.

'I am not unreasonable in my expectations,' he rejoins haughtily. 'It shall be settled, if you please, that Angeline and I will keep our own friends apart from you. Now let us drop the subject; and if you have had enough of this place, we had better, I think, be moving homeward.'

'I am quite ready to go home,' says Celia, in an aggrieved tone.

And then they leave the rooms, and in departing Captain Torwood catches a last glimpse of Eunice, keeping up an animated conversation with Mr. Minto and Mr. Kennard.

He does not guess that he is leaving an aching heart behind him. Eunice, with the keen sight of deep interest, has seen that he looks discontented and bored. She begins to share Angeline's doubts and fears; and in her own far-seeing little soul she pictures his future life with Celia Devereux.

'Ten minutes spent in her society are enough to depress one's spirits for a week!' she says to herself. 'Fancy having to spend years and years with that woman! I wish I could save him from his fate.'

## CHAPTER X.

### 'AH, OLD THOUGHTS, THEY CLING, THEY CLING!'

TO Bride Netterville in her new home the winter was passing quietly and speedily away.

Sir Bertram was resolved to pay all possible respect to the memory of the dead; he would have no Christmas festivities, no guests to stay in the house. Moreover, the duties of his new position occupied much of his time, and there was probably a good deal of private and personal business to be settled. He went up to town several

times, remaining away for a day or two; and then his daughter and the servants had the great house to themselves. Bride did not greatly miss him on these occasions; she had already learnt that she was not in the least necessary to his happiness, and looked back with a smile sometimes on her old dreams of filial devotion.

But she knew what was expected of her well enough, and made good use of her leisure in these quiet days. Masters came weekly from the cathedral town of Highminster, and Hannah watched her young lady with astonishment and admiration. Miss Netterville was determined that her father should not be disappointed; he should find her no unworthy daughter of the house, she said to herself; and so she worked on, harder, perhaps, than she would have worked if love, not pride, had been the stimulating power.

Brackenhurst Church was about half a mile from the house, if you followed a short cut which led through the park to the village. It was the smallest church that Bride had ever seen: so small, that it seemed at first sight incapable of holding anyone besides the Nettervilles and their servants. But there was a gallery at the west end which contained a tiny organ, and was always well filled on Sundays with smock-frocks, and uncomfortable coats and jackets of every conceivable cut. Young ploughmen and carters in their Sunday suits have, as Miss Netterville soon discovered, a difficulty in using their limbs in a natural way, and she learnt to regard some of the occupants of that gallery with compassion. They were, however, happy in the consciousness of heads shiny with grease, and neckties of the most brilliant hues, and bore the bondage of tight clothes

with complacency. Moreover, there was the hope of an approving word or smile from Miss Ryan after the service was over, if they had acquitted themselves well in the singing, and there was not a man or boy in Brackenhurst who would not have walked miles to win a kind look from Kate Ryan.

Kate was the Vicar's only child, and on her devolved the task of playing the organ and training the choir. Without being a genius, she was one of those practically clever persons who can always do the very things that are required of them; and when she came home from school to take her place permanently in the parish, it was not long before sundry beneficial changes were wrought. Instead of bellowing like bulls of Bashan, the men and boys learnt to sing in subdued voices, and poor Mr. Ryan's Sunday headaches became less frequent.

He was a quiet sensitive man, with an inborn horror of loud and discordant sounds, and the Sabbath roar from the gallery had been very terrible to him.

The Vicar and his daughter were the first callers on the Nettervilles. They came on a day when Sir Bertram was absent, and Bride received them alone.

The two girls knew at once that they should suit each other, and they formed, then and there, one of those quick, warm attachments which are peculiarly the friendships of women. 'Swift as a shadow, short as any dream' such friendships frequently are. And yet there is a sweetness in these sudden likings, and a pleasant sense of sympathy and mutual appreciation often lingers long after the friends have parted for ever.

Kate Ryan was a very pretty little woman, and everything about her was

singularly dainty and refined. She had a soft round face, framed in flossy hair of golden-brown, and her cheeks were tinged with tender rose-pink. Her eyes were those long, lustrous eyes, blue-grey, that seem to change colour, and get dark or light according to the mood of their possessor. Hers was a little blossom of a face, tinted as delicately as a pink-and-white convolvulus, and she was almost as fragile as a flower. A sudden joy would send the blood to her cheek, but the bloom would fade as quickly as it came. She was nervous, afraid of shocks, easily worried by little fears, and yet capable of daring anything for the sake of those she loved. 'A brave little coward,' the Vicar would say lovingly, as he stroked the silky waves of her hair.

'It's only my heart that makes me a coward,' she would answer. 'If I get the least bit frightened, it either stops alto-

gether or else goes on beating too fast! What are you to do when you have such a silly heart as mine?'

What indeed? Mr. Ryan would think of another heart, just as warm and true, which had throbbed its last on his breast. As the mother was, so was the child. Sensitive, intensely loving, always unselfish, it was no marvel that she was the pet of the little parish. The poor welcomed her as they welcomed the sunshine. And Miss Netterville found it easy to make friends in the cottages, when she went among the people with Kate by her side.

Sir Bertram did not concern himself in the least about the growing intimacy between Bride and Kate. The Nettervilles had always lived on good terms with their parsons. Mr. Ryan (in Sir Bertram's opinion, a muff) was unquestionably a man of good family; his daughter was

pretty and lady-like, and would be useful in amusing Miss Netterville during her days of retirement. By-and-by, of course, Bride would go into society and forget all about her little friend at the Vicarage but while it suited her to make a companion of the girl, she was free to take her own way.

One January morning, when Sir Bertram had again betaken himself to town, Bride set out through the park, hoping to meet Kate Ryan. The girls had agreed to have luncheon together; both felt that luncheon at the Hall was a pleasanter meal in Sir Bertram's absence, and gladly seized upon the opportunity of a *tête-à-tête*. The path which Bride followed was the 'short cut' that led directly to the church, and close to the church stood the Vicarage.

She walked on briskly, with only Jove, the bloodhound, for a companion. A grand,

tawny fellow was Jove; a dog of majestic presence, capable of inspiring timid or guilty strangers with terror, but quite incapable of frightening any member of the household. To those who knew him intimately, he seemed nothing but a splendid fraud: a creature too lazy and unsuspecting even to growl at a tramp. Jack, the wiry little terrier who had been dismissed by Sir Bertram for much barking, had always sniffed a vagrant afar off, and rushed out madly to do battle; but like many a trusty servant, he had made himself obnoxious by over-zeal, and the place that knew him once would know him no more.

Bride and Jove had speedily become fast friends. He had won her heart by affably presenting her with his massive paw, and she had openly declared him to be one of the most perfect gentlemen that she had ever seen.

It was now understood that he was the attendant chosen to accompany her in all her rambles. He padded at her heels, never hurrying himself, seldom stopping to examine objects by the wayside, rarely showing that interest in trivial things which distinguishes a dog of more sportive temperament. He was not amusing; but he was stately and well-bred, and in the depths of his indolent nature there really lurked a sincere affection for his mistress.

The morning was calm, and bright with the sunshiny peace which seems to belong rather to October than to January. It was a day that might have stolen back from the old year; an autumn ghost in whose presence the sharp winds died away, and mists began to hang their light veils over the fields again. To-morrow the winter blasts would return and the mists would vanish; but to-day was like a dream, hazy

and still, and its quietness was sweet to Bride.

The path that she had chosen was seldom used, save by the inmates of the Hall. It was a narrow way, in summer fragrant with honeysuckle; in spring, haunted by the faint sighs of violets; in winter, cheerful with the glossy green of the holly. And Bride, as she walked onward through the tranquil lights and shades, recalled her old self to bear her company, and revive the past.

She tried to fancy herself back again in the old Seacastle garden, bare and wintry now, with gleams of sunlight shining on the wet mould. Did anyone ever sit in her sacred shrubbery seat nowadays?

By-and-by the 'merry May-time' would sprinkle the meadow with buttercup-gold; and the west wind would tell its old tale to the creepers, sighing and singing when the

sunset light burnt low. Well, it was folly to remember; and yet she knew that she had not quite learnt forgetfulness.

Next month Lady Emily Swynford was coming to the Hall, and it was understood that Bride's training was to begin in earnest. Lady Emily had already written an affectionate letter to her dear Miss Netterville, saying that she looked forward with delight to her easy duties as a chaperon; and Bride had despatched a prettily worded reply.

So everything was arranged; her path was plainly marked out, and she was prepared to be docile and obedient. Still, if there had been the faintest tone of hope in Victor Ashburn's parting words, she would have taken her life into her own hands and shaped it after her own fashion. It was no lack of will-force that made Bride submissive; it was her utter hopelessness that

behind a bush of holly. Again she seemed to feel the shock and crash as the carriage turned over in the dusty road; and then came the remembrance of the painful awaking to consciousness, and the long days and nights of illness spent in her little room.

It was Captain Ludlow who stood yonder in the January sunlight, talking to the Vicar's daughter. Mr. Ryan had followed them out of the porch, and now all three were standing on the gravelled path; and their voices reached Bride's ears, although she could not hear the words they said.

But it was no longer a troubled, embarrassed man whom she saw, acting a part which nature had never intended him to play. Sidney Ludlow, perfectly at ease, and bearing himself with frank soldierly grace, was not the same Sidney who had kept an assignation with Robert Heather-

stone's wife. How handsome he looked with the fresh morning light shining on his brown face and well-cut features! And Bride could not help thinking that the strong soldier and the fair girl made a charming pair, for Kate was certainly at her prettiest that day. Her sweet face and sunny hair were seen to advantage under her little velvet toque. Her plain cloth jacket fitted closely to a perfect figure, and her skirt was short enough to reveal the tiny high-heeled shoes that were not too dainty for country walking.

Not wishing to be seen and recognised just then by Captain Ludlow, Bride began slowly to retrace her steps along the foot-path. The sight of her would recall circumstances that he, doubtless, desired to forget. She had heard enough from Cora Wallace to know that he had suffered a good many things from Maud's hands, and her

sympathies were enlisted on the side of the man for whom the sorceress had spread her snare. He had been weak, perhaps, but it is no easy task to shake off the shackles of an old love; and Bride could forgive him.

After a little while she turned again, much to the astonishment of Jove, who, however, imitated all her movements meekly enough. And then a slight rustle, and the fall of a light step on the crisp dead leaves, told her that Kate Ryan was coming towards her at last.

'I have been detained by a visitor,' began Kate, in a silvery tone of apology. 'A visitor who arrived quite unexpectedly last night, and took our quiet household by surprise. At first I thought Granny was going to be horribly cross; but she behaved beautifully after all. You know Granny has a trick of conducting herself in an unlooked-for manner. She is like Fate, and

always does the very things that you don't expect her to do.'

After a few visits to the parsonage, Bride had easily discovered the ruling spirit of the house. Mr. Ryan lived in a state of contented subjection; from the first hour of his marriage his mother-in-law had taken the management of him into her own hands, and she managed him still. Although she was nearly seventy years old, Mrs. Hay's governing powers were by no means on the wane. In all but age she was a young woman, alert, active, vigorous; exacting prompt obedience from every member of the family. Kate, on her return from school, had once or twice endeavoured to assert herself, and had been speedily extinguished—nobody understood the art of clapping down an extinguisher so well as Granny.

Yet it was a happy household that

acknowledged Mrs. Hay's tyrannical rule. On the whole she was a pleasant tyrant; her son-in-law respected her from the very bottom of his heart; the servants found her just, and not over-severe, and Kate was perhaps the only person who ever resented her autocratic ways. But then, in Kate's nature there was not one grain of bitterness, and all her little powers of malice were exhausted in a pretty pout or a pettish repartee. And in her innermost soul she was distinctly conscious that Granny loved her well.

'And the visitor?' said Bride, gently recalling Miss Ryan to the point from which she had started.

'Well, the visitor was a man, a Captain Ludlow. For years and years I have heard papa talk of Mr. Ludlow, his dearest college friend; and I don't know how it was that two such intimate friends came to

lose sight of each other. I think, however, that the fault must have been on papa's side; he has a warm heart and an indolent nature, and his laziness generally prevails over his affection to such an extent that he leaves letters unanswered. Anyhow, we never knew what had become of Mr. Ludlow till his death was announced in the papers. And yesterday morning there came a letter from his nephew.'

'From Captain Ludlow?'

'Yes; the note said that he was coming to see papa, and talk to him on an important subject. He arrived in the afternoon, prepared to take up his quarters in the village inn. But we would not hear of that, and so he spent last night under our roof.'

'And you liked him?'

'Well, yes—very much indeed. Even Granny was fascinated, and displayed all

her antiquated graces. It seems that Mr. Ludlow married late in life, and was left a widower with one little girl. The father accepted a foreign chaplaincy, and the child was left in the charge of her aunt—a woman with an immense number of boys. Just before poor Mr. Ludlow died, he wrote to his nephew, saying that he did not feel quite easy about his little daughter, and earnestly wished papa to have the care of her.'

'And are you really going to take her?'

'Yes; it is all arranged. Instead of crushing the scheme at once, Granny assented readily. It is only because she wants another person to manage; I fathom her motives, of course. But I think it will be very amusing to have a little girl in the house. Captain Ludlow means sometimes to come and see her.'

'His visits will be very amusing, too,' said Bride demurely.

'Well, life is rather tame at the Vicarage,' admitted Kate. 'A parson's daughter is a sort of curate, you see; and sometimes I can't help getting tired of "the trivial round, the common task."'

'But you are a very happy little woman?'

'Oh yes; very happy. And after all I never do get really weary of helping papa.'

Bride knew that the last words came straight from her companion's heart. When the girl spoke of her father her eyes shone under the silken lashes, and the tender pink deepened on her cheeks. She watched the sweet pure face, so lovely in its swift changes; and then the vision of another face rose up in her mind again.

Could Maud Heatherstone, with her sensuous beauty and evil soul, ever lure a man's love away from a girl like Kate?

Bride thought not. For she, too, was mercifully ignorant of many things that some of her more worldly sisters had learnt all too quickly. She knew nothing of that baneful fascination which may enslave the senses, although it never touches the heart.

## CHAPTER XI.

'SHE WAS A PHANTOM OF DELIGHT.'

A WEEK passed away, and then Captain Ludlow reappeared at the Vicarage.

He was accompanied by his little cousin, a child of eight, whom he presented to Mrs. Hay with manifest fear and trembling, uncertain about the impression she would make on that lady's mind.

'Muriel has been brought up with boys, he said, in an apologetic tone. 'But she means to be very good and obedient, I am sure.'

Mrs. Hay's mouth went down at the corners, and an irrepressible smile dimpled Kate's cheeks, as the little girl came forward. A most unique child was Miss Muriel Ludlow, stout and square-shouldered, and dressed in a rough cloth jacket of sailor-like cut. A broad-brimmed shiny hat was stuck at the back of her curly head, and the face that was upraised frankly to meet Granny's kiss was round, plump, and brown. Merry dark eyes, full of shrewdness; a turned-up nose, a large rosy mouth —it was the kind of countenance, thought Kate, that often went with white mice and a hurdy-gurdy. To her it seemed decidedly attractive, and promised a good deal of fun for the future; but Granny was taken aback.

She had expected a mild palefaced orphan, longing to be consoled, and ready to submit at once to her excellent system of

training. But Muriel was clearly not in need of consolation, and the task of training her would be by no means an easy one. Those dark eyes could be mutinous sometimes; the laughing red lips knew how to pout. Yet anyhow, the child had been received into the family, and they must make the best of her.

'So your name is Muriel,' said Granny, by way of beginning a conversation.

'Yes; but I'm always called Mew.'

The voice was pleasant, but it rang out loud and clear as a boy's. Mrs. Hay's eyebrows went up, and the corners of her mouth went down again.

The drawing-room at the Vicarage was a long low room which had once been divided into two parts by folding-doors. But the doors had long since given place to thick olive curtains, now looped back and falling into graceful folds. At each end of the

room a fire blazed and crackled merrily, filling every nook and corner with ruddy light.

Everything here seemed to welcome a stranger; couches and chairs were meant to be used; Kate's piano was open, ready to be played upon; her guitar stood close by. Some of Granny's old china was wired upon the walls; her Dresden shepherds and shepherdesses, and courtiers and ladies that looked as if they had come out of the Little Trianon, were perched gaily on the chimney-pieces. Muriel could not take her eyes off these bewitching china people; and Kate, foreseeing that looking would lead to handling, gently drew her away to the room upstairs prepared for her use.

There she was left to the care of a good-tempered housemaid, who divested her of the sailor's hat and jacket, and conducted

her downstairs again to partake of afternoon tea.

'I am quite sure I shall like you all very much. You seem to be regular bricks here,' remarked Miss Ludlow, on being liberally supplied with strawberry jam.

Fortunately for the new-comer, this statement was unheard by Mrs. Hay. Muriel had been accommodated with a seat at the well-spread tea-table. Kate presided over an ancient silver tea-urn, and watched the child with amused eyes.

'Has that come off the top of a tomb?' inquired Muriel, pointing to the urn. 'It looks as if it came out of a churchyard.'

'*What?*' said Mrs. Hay sharply.

She was drinking her tea at her own pet little table; and the Vicar and Captain Ludlow were discussing politics. But the clear boyish voice made itself heard through their conversation.

'Old Mrs. Smith has got one just like it over her grave,' Muriel went on. 'Jack said they used to burn up dead folks, and put all that was left of them into those things.'

'Muriel!' exclaimed Captain Ludlow, in a warning tone, 'I cautioned you against talking too much!'

'Why, Cousin Sidney, I've hardly spoken a word yet! But I do so want to know if that thing was ever in the churchyard. We are very close to people's graves here, and I thought——'

'Little girls must be silent at meals,' said Granny solemnly. 'I am accustomed to see well-behaved children around me. I have had three little girls of my own.'

'You must have been sorry that they weren't boys, ma'am,' observed the irrepressible. 'Boys are ever so much jollier! But I suppose you had to make the best of the little girls.'

'You must go to bed very early,' said Mrs. Hay severely. 'You are getting over-excited and feverish. I shall have to dose you if I see any more of these dangerous symptoms!'

'Will it be a powder or a draught?' asked Muriel, with great anxiety.

'Both,' quoth Granny grimly; 'and a pill into the bargain.'

Muriel's lips were pursed up into whistling form, but no sound issued from them. Mrs. Hay had got the better of her at last. She devoted herself to the jam in silence.

The remembrance of that quiet evening haunted Sidney Ludlow for many a day. Kate Ryan, flitting about with soft footfalls and bright eyes, answered perfectly to his idea of a home-fairy:

> 'A creature not too bright and good
> For human nature's daily food.'

Hers was a delicate and gracious beauty

that stood the test of close inspection. Her face had many changes, but not one look that was not pure and sweet. And then there was 'something of an angel,' too, in this girl. Her voice and smile soothed, while they charmed him, and almost revived his boyish belief in the sanctity of womanhood.

It was not wonderful that he should have forgotten such a creed. There were not many of his women-friends who desired to keep it in his mind. His thoughts strayed from Kate to the girls who betted with him, smoked with him, listened to his most racy stories, and related some (still racier) in return. They were pleasant enough in their way; good fellows in petticoats, yet without a good fellow's best points. Somehow they always retained the petty meannesses of their own sex, while they failed to grasp the nobler qualities of his.

They were amusing, doubtless. Had they not studied the art of amusing men? Yes; but their gaiety sickened him sometimes, and sent him away thinking of old-world traditions, and ancient household sayings. He had even caught himself wondering whether he should ever find again those men *sans peur* and those women *sans reproche*, who had won their glorious eulogy in the days of yore.

The Vicar was called away to a sick parishioner. Muriel, really sleepy after her journey, had been led off to bed in a docile mood. Granny, seated in her favourite chair, began to nod a little over the *Times*. And Sidney and Kate were busy in the music-corner, turning over a heap of old songs, and trying bits of new ones.

Kate had a silvery soprano voice, fresh and well-trained. Its notes made you

think of 'the horns of Elfland, faintly blowing' among the echoes of the hills. She was fond of singing songs about mountains and waterfalls. And something in those clear trills reminded you always of a morning sky; a bird soaring; a blue gentian set high up in crystals of snow. Sidney Ludlow had listened to many richer voices—voices that had called up dreams of glowing sunsets, and passionate meetings and farewells. But there was no passion in Kate's singing, and yet he did not miss the deeper tones. He had been so long bound to earth that he was tired of the bonds, and wanted to soar.

He felt that night that he could heartily rejoice in his freedom. He wanted to love again, and to love a woman as unlike his old love as possible. His lip curled now in disgust at his former weakness. What a slave he had been! How he had despised

his idol, even while he laid his heart beneath her feet!

With Maud he had always been passion-tossed—morbid—dissatisfied, even when he had imagined himself loved. Her fondest words and caresses were like the fruit sold in Goblin Market, rich to the taste, but leaving behind a bitter hunger and burning pain. Well, the cravings were stilled; the thirst was quenched; the madness was over (as he believed) for ever.

And when Kate came to the end of one of those mountain-songs of hers, she found Sidney's brown eyes fixed upon her with a look that deepened the pink on her cheeks. She tried to think of something commonplace to say, but not one word could she utter at that moment.

'Do you ever read Shelley?' he said suddenly, his eyes still shining, his voice deep and tender—

'"My soul is an enchanted boat,
Which, like a sleeping swan, doth float
Upon the silver waves of thy sweet singing;
And thine doth like an angel sit
Beside the helm conducting it,
Whilst all the winds with melody are ringing."

I shall want to hear you sing very often, Miss Ryan. Yours is just the kind of music that a man pines for, when he has been as troubled and tossed as I have.'

Her soft eyes could meet his then. He had known sorrow, and the girl's instinctive desire to comfort conquered her shyness.

'Have you been troubled?' she said gently. 'I am so sorry. It seems easy for a woman to bear her trials, but a man——'

'Ah, we have not half your fortitude. We don't shrink from gunpowder and steel, but we take the common disappointments of life far less bravely than you do. I wish you could teach us that quiet courage of yours.'

'I have been but little tried.' She spoke in a shy voice. 'Mine is such a simple ignorant life. I'm afraid sometimes that I don't know enough about trouble to be a good consoler. And yet I want to comfort people so much.'

Her beautiful eyes were lifted timidly to his. The innocent look charmed and thrilled him.

'You do comfort people,' he answered. 'You create an atmosphere of peace around you. It is a long time since I have had a glimpse of a true home. But I've found one here in this dear old house at last. And I'm beginning to feel that my lost faith in women is coming back.'

Then it was a woman who had disappointed him, and embittered his life!

As she jumped to that conclusion her eyes brightened, her face took a soft flush, like a fresh apple-blossom. Most women love

to heal a wound that has been inflicted by one of themselves. They think that while they cure the hurt they can charm away the memory of her who dealt the blow. In that moment Kate began to have her visions of soothing his heartache, and restoring his trust in heaven.

It was an innocent little dream enough, poor child! And it is doubtful whether she would have cared half so much for a lover who had come to her swearing that she was his first love. Romeo was not, perhaps, less successful with Juliet because of his former passion for Rosaline. Nor did Duke Orsino fail to win Viola because he had wooed Olivia in vain. That virginity of heart which a man prizes in a woman is by no means so highly valued by a woman when she finds it in a man.

To succeed thoroughly, a wooer should guide his steps by the light of experience.

And if he can convince his new love that he brings her a crushed spirit and blighted affections, he will at once awaken that strong compassion which is only a deeper feeling in disguise.

'I am sorry that you ever lost your faith in us,' said Kate, after a little pause. 'We are often weak and frivolous, I know. But we can be constant and unselfish.'

'Constant — unselfish!' he repeated bitterly. 'What hollow words they seem to me!'

She gave him a gentle look of reproach, and he became penitent in a moment.

'I am tired of my sceptical mood, Miss Ryan. I want to believe in people again. Will you go on with the good work you have begun, and win me back into a better frame?' he asked eagerly.

'I will try,' she answered simply. And so the compact was made.

Waking up with a jerk, Granny was heard to wonder what time it was. Kate, feeling unaccountably nervous, began to play a dreamy waltz; and Captain Ludlow sauntered across the room to the old lady's side. Presently the Vicar returned to the drawing-room, and then came prayers and bedtime.

So they all went, with much apparent serenity, to their respective chambers that night. But if the truth must be told, a certain phantom with brown eyes and dark hair, and a martial bearing, haunted Kate's dreams. And a delicate, rose-tinted face seemed to hover over Captain Ludlow in his slumbers, until he woke with a start, only to remember that the sweet face had its counterpart in real life, and would smile upon him at the breakfast-table to-morrow.

Morning dawned brightly enough for January, and Sidney found all the members

of the household assembled when he came downstairs. Muriel, very sharp and vigorous, after a sound sleep, was so well pleased with her quarters that she was disposed to patronize everybody in a good-humoured way, from Granny downwards. But that august lady had an eye upon her new charge, and was prepared to begin her system of training without loss of time.

'Come here, Muriel,' she said when breakfast was over, and the child had skipped away to the window.

'Yes, in a minute,' was the reply.

'You must learn prompt obedience. Come at once.'

'All right. I want just to see these robins—one, two, three. And oh, what a jolly speckled thrush! I'll set a trap for him.'

'You will do nothing of the kind,' said

Granny, the bows of her cap quivering with indignation. 'And if you do not immediately come to me I shall have to punish you.'

Muriel turned her back to the window and the birds, and advanced slowly towards Mrs. Hay. She had caught a warning glance from Sidney, and an entreating one from Kate, and was evidently resolved to behave herself very well indeed.

'Now I want to know all about your studies,' Granny began. 'First, there is your religious training to be attended to. Can you say your Catechism?'

'Little bits of it,' said Muriel honestly. 'But I never thought anybody could say it right through. The part about the Lord's prayer is such a poser.'

'*I* could say it right through when I was your age,' remarked Mrs. Hay sadly. 'But they don't know how to train children

nowadays. I suppose you have learnt some chapters out of the Bible ?'

'Oh yes; I can tell you all about Samson setting fire to the foxes' tails. That was a lark, and no mistake, wasn't it ?'

'Your tone is irreverent, my dear; but you are hardly to be blamed for that. It is easy to see that you have been infamously neglected. Is it possible that you have never been taught to repeat a hymn, or a pretty little poem ?'

'I do know one little piece of poetry, ma'am,' responded Muriel, with earnest gravity. 'Jack taught it to me; it's very short, and I think you'll like it. It's not a hymn exactly, though.'

'Well, let me hear it,' said Granny, in quite an encouraging tone.

And Muriel, with much dramatic action, recited the vainglorious lines:

'"Two skinny Frenchmen, and a Portuguee,
One jolly Englishman whacked all three!"'

A smothered burst of laughter from the end of the room, and then a sound of rustling skirts made Granny sharply turn her head. But she was too late to reprove the culprits. Both Sidney and Kate had taken to flight, and were seen no more till they appeared at luncheon.

## CHAPTER XII.

'THE HEART IS ALL ATHIRST AGAIN, THE DROPS ARE ALL OF GOLD.'

LADY EMILY and her husband arrived at Brackenhurst Hall in February, and Bride felt that her spell of peace and quietness had really come to an end. No more solitary rambles with Jove at her heels; no more free-and-easy intercourse with her little friend at the Vicarage; Lady Emily was watchful, affectionate, and exacting to the last degree. Of the arrangements that had been made

between her father and his guests, Bride knew little, but she guessed a good deal. Lady Emily was not the woman to work for nothing.

Mr. Swynford was a meek little man whom she had married rather late in her life; rumour said he was her last chance. She was, and always had been, a plain woman of the angular type, with a hard Roman nose and cold eyes. From her youth up she had fought that bitter battle with the world which only the aristocratic poor can fully understand; and it had seamed her face with traces that no after-time of peace could ever smooth away. And yet there was an indescribable charm in her trained voice and quiet manner, and in the ready sympathy which (unreal as it was) was never lacking at the right moment.

Her heart, if she had ever had one,

must have been shrivelled up long ago; but tact and perfect breeding are excellent substitutes for feeling, and Lady Emily was generally spoken of among her friends as a woman of sweet temper and kindness of nature.

Perhaps they were not very wrong after all. It was not her fault that her toil had been all against the collar ever since she had emerged from the schoolroom, and struggling, watching, and scheming had occupied her from girlhood to womanhood. In another state of life she might have turned out a clever worthy woman; a keen manager always, but quite ready to expend her natural shrewdness in helping her neighbours.

Anyhow, she had been a devoted if somewhat tyrannical mother; and if her children did not rise up and call her blessed, they were not slow to acknowledge

that they owed everything to her management.

Soon after Bride's departure from Seacastle, Mrs. Collington and Miss Wallace had gone to Rome. They were spending the winter there; but the spring would bring them home again.

Miss Wallace was never surprised at anything; she generally foresaw the things that were coming to pass; and even the startling change in Bride's fortunes was accepted with perfect coolness and philosophy.

'I always expected something romantic to happen to you,' she wrote. 'Of course you were not born to blush unseen in that nastiest of villages. We shall hear a great deal about you next season.'

The Swynfords had been staying at the Hall for several days, and life was going on smoothly and monotonously enough.

It was very seldom that anything happened at Brackenhurst; there was no gossip, no news of any kind. One morning, however, Sir Bertram came down to breakfast with tidings of a sudden disaster.

'Sad thing at Fairwood,' he said.

'Where is Fairwood?' Lady Emily asked.

'A small place about eight or nine miles off. The Forresters used to live there when I was a boy. I don't know anything of these new people—the Heatherstones. It seems that poor Heatherstone fell off his horse yesterday at his own gate, and never spoke afterwards.'

'Heatherstone!' repeated Bride.

'Heatherstone!' echoed Lady Emily. 'That must be the man who married Maud Collington. I knew her mother very well.'

Lady Emily did not add that she and Mrs. Collington had fought a valiant battle

over poor Robert Heatherstone; but Maud's beauty had secured the prize which had been coveted for the elder Miss Swynford.

'I remember Heatherstone,' piped little Mr. Swynford. 'A man who never had anything the matter with him.'

'He must have had something the matter with him on Monday,' said Sir Bertram. 'A sudden attack of giddiness, Hudson says. But how the deuce can anyone tell what it was when the man never spoke after his fall?'

'It is very sad,' sighed Lady Emily. 'Those bluff florid men almost always die suddenly; and he was perpetually talking about his perfect health, poor fellow! His widow must be very well provided for. She will marry again soon, I dare say. A handsome girl she was; but the men used to be afraid of her temper. I think her

mother must have found her very troublesome. The other daughter went to India, or somewhere. I wonder what has become of Mrs. Collington!'

'She is in Rome,' said Bride. 'And my friend Miss Wallace is with her.'

'Oh, do you know that beautiful Cora Wallace?' cried Lady Emily, with rather more animation than she usually displayed. 'I always liked her exceedingly. She will make a great match one of these days, I believe.'

'I have often wondered why she was not married,' Bride remarked.

'Where did you meet her, Bride?' asked Sir Bertram.

'At Seacastle, papa. Mrs. Collington lived there, and Miss Wallace stayed with her. I got quite intimate with them.'

Lady Emily slightly inclined her head backwards, drooped her eyelids, and then

took a survey of Miss Netterville in the most unobtrusive manner possible. Her daughters knew that look and dreaded it; but Bride was unacquainted with Lady Emily's ways, and did not suspect that she was being closely studied.

There was just a shade of embarrassment in the girl's manner. The warm creamy fairness of her cheek was tinted with a very faint blush; her mouth was not quite so placid as usual. Lady Emily saw everything, and began to draw her own conclusions.

'Poor Mrs. Collington,' she said, smiling. 'She must have got worn out with her duties as a chaperon and a mother! Yet I never thought she would have taken kindly to a rustic life. Is Seacastle a very charming village?'

'It's detestably unwholesome!' exclaimed Sir Bertram. 'I spent one night there

among spiders, and caterpillars, and noisome odours! If I had known what kind of place it was,' he added, with a paternal air, 'I should not have allowed my daughter to remain in it so long.'

'But it seems to have agreed with Miss Netterville,' observed Lady Emily smoothly. 'And she made some pleasant acquaintances, I am sure. Mrs. Collington always had the art of drawing the nicest people around her. No doubt her house was full of guests?'

'Sometimes,' answered Bride.

She did not want to talk about the guests at Verbena Lodge. A nervous dread of hearing Captain Ashburn's name made her long to change the subject of conversation. But even while the pink was deepening on her cheek, the veteran chaperon divined her anxiety, and quietly came to her relief.

'My dear, I am quite impatient to see

your new brown costume,' she said, speaking in a maternal voice. 'You must indulge me by trying it on before luncheon. My girls used to say I took a deeper interest in their dress than they did themselves.'

So the costume was donned soon after breakfast, and Lady Emily gave it her entire approval. A very pleasant hour was idled away in Bride's rooms. They discussed the merits of certain shades, and speculated on the coming fashions. Then from dress they passed on to jewellery, and Bride produced her grandmother's jewels. She had never cared much about wearing them. Victor Ashburn had loved best to see her decked with flowers; and the fancy lingered with her still. But Lady Emily was well pleased with the display.

They were still sitting with the glittering things spread out around them, when

Hannah entered with a note from the Vicarage.

Lady Emily, trifling with a fine set of pearls, was quietly studying Bride's face. There were only a few lines in the letter.

'I wish you could come to me to-day, dear Bride' (the words ran). 'It is the very happiest day I have ever known. Captain Ludlow has asked me to be his wife, and papa has given his consent. You may fancy that I want somebody to talk to! Granny is too old, and Mew too young to sympathize. This is a stupid scrawl, but it is so difficult to write when one is so happy! Is there any bliss like mine, I wonder? I think not.'

Out of doors there was bright February sunshine; snowdrops were hanging their pale heads in the fresh light; crocuses made a glimmer of gold in the borders. A fire blazed merrily in the room, and yet

a strange chill was creeping over Bride Netterville. Her cheek paled as she folded up that little letter.

The news of Maud's widowhood, and of Kate's betrothal, had come to her on the same day.

'Isn't it a pity to waste the whole of this lovely morning?' she said, rousing herself, and turning to Lady Emily. 'We ought, I think, to get a drive before luncheon.'

The carriage was ordered, and took the road that led past the Vicarage. Kate, dressed for walking, was standing at the gate, and while the two girls chatted for a few minutes, Lady Emily placidly contemplated the landscape.

'He will be here this evening,' Kate whispered. 'I have had a telegram.'

She was so lovely in her happiness, and so calm in her trust, that a weight seemed

to be lifted off Bride's spirit. After all, there could be no real danger to be apprehended from Maud Heatherstone; surely that sullen, sensuous beauty could never compete with the sunny charm of Kate's sweet face!

'That is a very pretty girl,' said Lady Emily, as they drove onward. 'A delicate, graceful little thing; decidedly thoroughbred.'

'Yes, she is perfectly charming,' Bride answered, well pleased. 'And she is my friend; the only friend I have made since I left Seacastle.'

Lady Emily smiled. 'How young this girl is!' she thought. 'She fears no rivalry; she has not developed any of the spite that *must* be latent in her nature. In all my experience I've never known a woman *quite* devoid of spite. However, she is really beautiful enough to be good-natured.'

Then aloud she said in her blandest voice:

'I'm afraid you will be overwhelmed with friends by-and-by, dear child. The women always come purring round an acknowledged beauty. They are ever ready to smile sweetly on one of the favourites of fortune.'

Bride sighed a little, thinking of the days when fortune seemed to have forgotten her altogether, and love had only sought her to breathe an eternal farewell. And then came the remembrance of Eunice's brave championship, and Cora's unselfish kindness.

'I hope you are not one of those who sneer at woman's friendship, Lady Emily,' she said inquiringly.

The old chaperon's smile was a study for the physiognomist.

'I never sneer at anything, my dear,' she answered. 'It's always bad form to be satirical; we must accept all the pretty

fictions of society with an air of perfect faith. So long as they are not rivals, women may like each other fairly well, I believe—in fact, they may even play into each other's hands. But——'

'But what, Lady Emily?'

'But it is safest never to trust a woman; that's all. Never put any weapon into her hands that can be turned against you. A man may become your foe and yet forbear to strike; but a woman will always use the power she possesses.'

Bride answered with a slight incredulous shake of the head.

'Forgive me,' she said, 'for setting my opinion against yours. You will laugh at me, I dare say, when I tell you that I have known women who were capable of really disinterested kindness—capable of taking pains to defend a girl's fair fame, and giving her their countenance and friendship.'

Lady Emily narrowed her eyes as she looked at her companion.

'How very interesting, my dear!' she exclaimed. 'I have always thought that the quietest lives were full of the most instructive experiences; and here is a proof that I was not mistaken. Did you meet these women at Seacastle? And the girl they defended—what had she done?'

'The story is not worth telling,' replied Bride, in a *nonchalant* tone. 'Do you see that break in the trees yonder? In clear weather you can catch a glimpse of the spire of Highminster Cathedral from this spot. It is a very pretty view.'

'All the views here are pretty,' Lady Emily responded readily. 'Yes, I really think I can see the spire; but my eyes are getting old. Sir Bertram is cutting down a little timber—well, he can spare a few trees; the woods are very dense.'

'Papa says they want thinning,' Bride remarked. 'I have not seen them in their full perfection yet; it was late in autumn when we came here. What picnics we can have in these old woods next summer, Lady Emily!'

'Yes, when the season is over,' said the chaperon. 'But there are a great many things to be accomplished before next summer comes, my dear child.'

Bride was silent, thinking of what last summer had done for her.

Later in the day, when dinner was over, and she sat in her grandmother's old boudoir with Lady Emily, her thoughts strayed away to the Vicarage. While her guest, with gold-rimmed eye-glasses lodged on the bridge of her Roman nose, was studying the columns of a lady's newspaper, Bride's fancy drew a fair picture of Kate and her soldier-lover in the quaint old drawing-room,

with Granny's Dresden china people smirking upon their courting, and Mrs. Hay herself slumbering opportunely in her favourite armchair.

And that fancy picture was not one whit pleasanter than the reality.

Sidney and his betrothed had repaired as usual to the music-corner, behind the friendly shelter of the piano. Their performance was of a soothing kind; songs and waltzes which had a lullaby strain were artfully selected; and Granny speedily yielded to their influence. At length a gentle snore announced that the good lady's slumbers were sweet and deep; and then the notes died away into silence. Sidney brought his chair very near to Kate's side, and drew the girl's slight figure close to his breast.

'Kate, I love you!' he said for the thousandth time.

'You have told me that so often,' she whispered, with the prettiest pout imaginable.

'There's nothing so delightful as the old, old story,' he said, pressing a long kiss on the soft red lips.

She raised a slim finger, and stroked that dark, handsome face with a curious consciousness of possession. Her eyes sought his coyly, and then sank quickly beneath his gaze.

'What are you thinking about, darling?' he asked.

'Only—only, how strange it seems that you should belong to me. It is all so new. Sidney, have you never loved anyone as you love me now?'

He hesitated.

'I love you with my best love, dearest,' he answered. 'The first is not always the deepest, nor the best.'

And she was satisfied.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### 'FOR SHE IS WISE, IF I CAN JUDGE OF HER.'

THE month of April was very near its end, and the sunlight, growing stronger and brighter every day, was shining into the open windows of a gay little house in Park Lane.

The house had a small balcony which looked like a little garden in the air; festoons of ivy swung to and fro in the light winds; saffron-flowers and tulips of gaudy hues glistened in the sun. In the

room behind the balcony there were flowers too: hyacinths in pots and stands, and baskets and bowls full of violets. A Mirabeau would have revelled in that scented atmosphere; but Sir Bertram Netterville, looking wan and peevish on a Sunday morning, declared that it was sickly and over-sweet.

'This room smells like Atkinson's shop,' he said querulously. 'I can scarcely breathe in it; there must be a bushel of violets here.'

'Lord Inglefield sent them last night,' replied Lady Emily quietly. 'Bride happened to say that she was fond of them.'

'I never could get on with Inglefield myself,' he remarked, wrinkling up his white forehead. 'I object to men who can't leave the world as they find it. And he goes in for too many things at once—an aristocratic Jack-of-all-trades, isn't he?

Philanthropic, literary, artistic, and heaven knows what besides.'

'All the women rave about him,' said Lady Emily.

'Humph! He looks so insufferably like the Arthurs and Galahads of modern pictures, that I'm sick of the sight of his face.'

'But it is a wonderfully handsome face,' Lady Emily answered. 'And its owner has about twenty thousand a year. He's a most desirable match in every way; dear Bride has made a splendid hit.'

'Are you sure that she has made it?' the father asked. 'She has a good deal of romance in her, and he sees that she's interested in all those trumpery regeneration schemes of his. Perhaps he will be content with her sympathy, and ask for nothing more.'

'Sympathy!' repeated Lady Emily, with quiet scorn. 'Do you suppose I would let

him be philandering if that were all he wanted? I have had too many years of experience, Sir Bertram, to be deceived in a man's intentions. No; he means all that he ought to mean. I'm quite certain of it.'

'Of course you are right,' admitted Sir Bertram, reassured by her firmness. 'But wasn't there some story about his dead wife? People said he would never try marriage a second time.'

'People are generally wrong when they say things of that kind. Yes; there was a very sad story indeed. He married soon after he came of age, some pretty nobody who turned out to have been false from the very beginning of their acquaintance. Fortunately for himself and everybody else, she died shortly after the painful discoveries were made.'

'He must have been an uncommon fool

to have married her,' observed Sir Bertram, with a sneer.

'Not an uncommon fool. Most men are tempted to commit such follies at a certain period of their lives,' rejoined Lady Emily composedly.

If Sir Bertram winced, he did not show it. He knew well enough that in the eyes of Lady Emily and her set, Bride's mother was merely a 'pretty nobody'; and he had been willing enough to make a fool of himself for her sake.

But that was years ago; and it almost seemed to him as if the youth who had wooed pretty Bridget under the old trees at Brackenhurst must have been buried in her grave. There are some men who are never aware of their own follies until they see them repeated in another person. To Sir Bertram it seemed impossible to believe that Lord Inglefield could have had the

same excuses for his indiscretion that *he* had.

'I have always expected that Lord Inglefield would come home and marry again,' Lady Emily continued. 'You know he has been abroad a good deal, and hasn't spent a season in town for a long while. He must be past thirty now; of course he wants a suitable wife, and an heir, and a settled life. All the mothers have got their eyes upon him; but I think they are beginning to lose hope. Bride's conquest is so very evident.'

'His attentions are decidedly marked, then?'

'Most marked. And it seems that he and Bride are old acquaintances—no, hardly acquaintances; but he saw her last summer at Seacastle.'

'How on earth could he have seen her at Seacastle?' exclaimed Sir Bertram.

'I always thought she was buried alive there.'

'I am surprised that you were not told of her adventure. The poor child was thrown out of a phaeton, it seems, and nearly lost her life. Lord Inglefield came up in a carriage, and took her home with her companion in misfortune; some lady who was driving with her, I believe.'

'What could the Ormistons have been thinking of? How dared they let her go driving about the country in phaetons?' cried Sir Bertram, more excited than Lady Emily had ever seen him.

'I must leave that question to be answered by others,' she replied, with her usual coolness. 'Anyhow, good has come out of ill; Lord Inglefield has never forgotten her face.'

'Your admirable management will arrange everything.' Sir Bertram became his calm

and polished self again. 'Really, it will be a capital match. And if he fancied the child last summer when she was in very different circumstances——'

'She certainly made a deep impression on him. I have only had to stand still and look on,' smiled Lady Emily. 'Of course we must be watchful. But I have no doubt about the issue.'

This little conversation took place just before luncheon. Bride and her chaperon had been to church, and then the former had gone to her own room, leaving her elders *tête-à-tête*.

Not until the luncheon-bell sounded did Miss Netterville reappear. Sir Bertram, eyeing her narrowly, observed that she looked grave. It was a sign that she was turning a certain matter over in her mind, and preparing an answer to the momentous question that was coming. Grave or gay,

she was always lovely. But gaiety with her never came in flashes of mirth or high spirits; it was only a soft glow.

'You are none the worse for last night's ball, my love,' he said, in his best paternal tone.

'No, papa. I am quite well, thank you.'

'Bride has perfect health,' said Lady Emily. 'She takes everything with such delightful coolness. Girls are literally destroyed by excitement.'

'Inglefield dines here to-night, doesn't he?' asked Sir Bertram, busy with his cutlet.

The question was addressed to nobody in particular. Bride answered it.

'Yes. And he wants us to go to the opera. To-morrow he is to take us to the private view of the Grosvenor Gallery. It will be amusing, I think. One likes to see authors and artists.'

.' Quite right, my dear,' said Lady Emily. ' They are in the swim nowadays.'

Later in the day, Miss Netterville and Lord Inglefield were sitting in the violet-scented drawing-room, close to one of the windows. Lady Emily, with half-closed eyes, reclined in a low chair; Mr. Swynford and Sir Bertram sustained a languid conversation by the fireside, and the pair at the window could talk in low tones without any fear of interruption.

It was one of those balmy evenings that sometimes come to us at the close of April, when the air has all the softness of summer and the subtle sweetness of spring. Above the crowded park and its budding trees was a clear sky, faintly tinted with gold, and flecked here and there with detached clouds, bright as snow. Bride was in a happy mood; life was new, homage was sweet, and moreover she had begun to feel a

pleasure in Lord Inglefield's companionship.

Was she verily in love with him? Her eyes sought his face with keen appreciation of its marvellous perfection; her ears listened to his voice without losing one of its melodious tones; her spirit reverenced him as a teacher, and a seeker after the highest good. She was calmly aware of his intentions; no doubt as to his real meaning ever crossed her mind. From the very beginning of their intercourse she had read his character as correctly as Lady Emily, with her cold worldly penetration, had done; and knew that his was one of those earnest natures that are incapable of trifling or pretence.

A bunch of his own violets was set deep in lace on the bodice of her gown. Lady Emily's eyes had taken note of that little bouquet, and she had silently commended

Bride for her attention to trifles. Lord Inglefield was just the man to be gratified by the subtle flattery implied in wearing his flowers.

She was honestly proud of Miss Netterville. Never had a chaperon's duties been made easier, never had her efforts been so quickly crowned with success. What a handsome pair they were! She meant to feign sleepiness, and listen to every word they said.

'So you are to deliver a lecture to women to-morrow?' said Bride, in her soft voice.

She sat with the light falling full upon her face, and bringing out all the rich gold in her hair. Her calm eyes, blue as forget-me-nots, were raised frankly to meet his gaze.

'Yes,' he answered; 'a lecture to working-women.'

'I should like to hear it. Not that I can lay claim to the title of a working-woman. There never was a girl so idle as I have been lately. But I think the lecture might do me some good. What is the subject?'

'It is a very old subject,' he said. '"A Woman's Glory."'

'"A Woman's Glory"?' she repeated musingly. 'Ah, I know what it means. Those words are taken from a poem that I've read somewhere.'

'You have a quick memory. They are taken from Mrs. Browning's poem, "The Romaunt of the Page." I am going to read some of the verses to-morrow. But these are the lines that are specially marked.'

He repeated them distinctly, yet in a very quiet voice:

'"Look up! there is a small bright cloud
Alone amid the skies!

So high, so pure, and so apart,
A woman's glory lies."
The page looked up—the cloud was sheen;
A sadder cloud did rush, I ween,
Betwixt it and his eyes.'

Never was it given to any man of these times to look more like 'a knight of gallant deeds' than Lord Inglefield did at that moment. Although a modern coat and snowy shirt-linen took the place of shining mail, there was a stamp of old-world pride and dignity on his perfect features that is right rarely seen on the faces of Englishmen of to-day. To Bride he seemed the very impersonation of that haughty Sir Hubert, who broke a true heart unawares when he scoffed at his page's tale.

'The knight was a hard man,' she said suddenly.

'No,' Lord Inglefield answered; 'he could be tender enough to his supposed page. He was but true to certain traditions

of honour which were as sacred as his vows to God. No man can have too exalted an idea of the purity of womanhood.'

'But no woman on earth could have been purer than his disguised wife,' argued Bride. 'Think of her patience, her courage, her devotion.'

'And think of the scenes that she must have looked upon! Could any lady, carefully cherished and gently nurtured, become familiar with the coarseness of camp life, and keep an unsullied mind? Remember that her disguise deprived her of that respect which would have been shown to her sex. Men dealt with her roughly, as one of themselves. No, no; the knight was right.'

'He was wrong,' persisted Bride. 'He was like the base Indian who threw the pearl away. It was a pearl still, although it had been in the mire.'

'You cannot look at a woman with our eyes,' Lord Inglefield said gravely. 'Her glory is truly akin to that of the cloud—high, pure, and *apart*. It must not be touched even by the faintest shade of contamination. It must never stoop to float too near the common earth.'

'That will sound beautifully in your lecture,' smiled Bride. 'I can fancy all the young women wanting to float very high. But where will you find a woman who comes up to your standard of perfection? Not in our everyday world.'

Lady Emily (still making an elaborate pretence of dozing) could scarcely help smiling in scorn. Here was a man who had no business in this pleasant, degenerate world of to-day. His talk was something like an old romance, full of inflated nonsense, high-sounding, utterly ridiculous. Yet she devoutly hoped that Bride's spirit

of resistance would not carry her too far.

'It is in our everyday world that I shall find her,' he said confidently: 'The principles of chivalry were beautiful enough, but the times were not pure. Our women are far better, I honestly believe, than their sisters who were fought for at the tournaments. Only they have a less exalted opinion of their own importance.'

'Do you want us to be vainer than we are?' Bride asked.

'Not vainer.' He spoke gravely and sweetly. 'I only want you to be fully conscious of your power. I want you to feel that the Duke of Bourbon spoke simple truth to his knights of the Golden Shield. He bade them above all to reverence the ladies, because from them, after God, comes all the honour that men can acquire.'

A faint flush crept up into Bride's cheek. He was convinced that something within her responded to that desire of his.

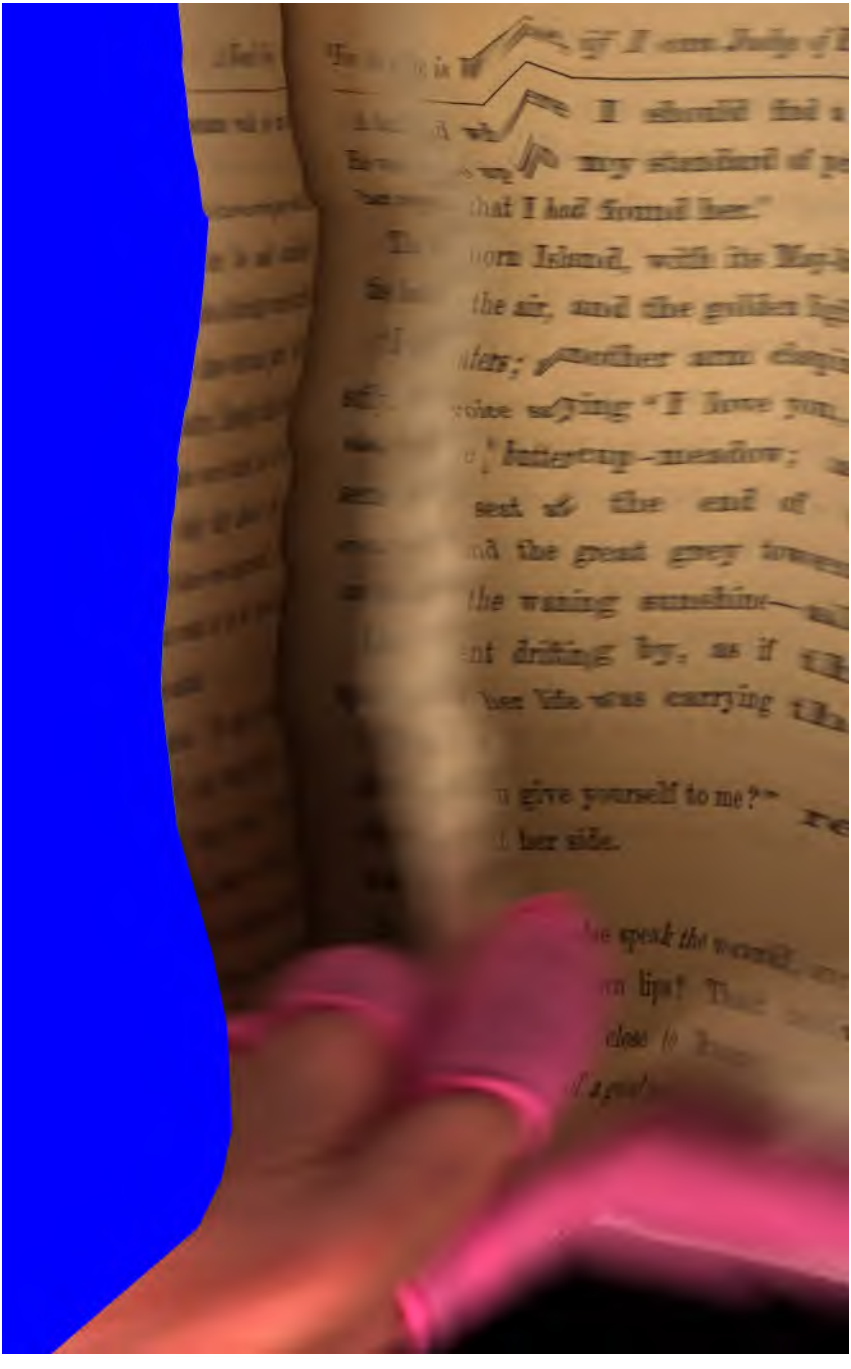
The little mocking smile had died away; the lashes veiled the large blue eyes.

'I think you are right,' she answered softly. 'We have grown so terribly prosaic, that we are afraid of anything that seems to be touched with romance. And even when we are conscious of power, we are too careless about the use of it.'

Lady Emily silently applauded that little speech.

'How gracefully the girl yields to his absurdities!' she thought. And then, unclosing her eyes a very little way, she saw that Lord Inglefield's glance was eloquent. He had drawn an inch nearer to Bride, and his voice sank almost to a whisper.

'You will be a perfect queen if you will only take up your sceptre,' he murmured.



It was entirely owing to Lady Emily's excellent management that Lord Inglefield had his opportunity after dinner.

In the soft dusk of the spring night he found Bride standing by the open window alone. There was only the glow of fire-light in the room; the lace curtain was stirred by the evening air; and she stood, a stately, still figure, looking out at the darkening sky.

'It is growing cold,' he said, taking her hand in his, and drawing her nearer to the fire. 'The air is too chill for you. Do you know that I can't bear you to run the least possible risk?'

The little hand remained passively in his clasp.

'Will you give yourself to me, Bride?' he asked. 'I want you to help me in my work in life; I want you to be *my* queen. You said, a little while ago, that you

wondered where I should find a woman who came up to my standard of perfection. I knew that I *had* found her.'

Hawthorn Island, with its May-blossoms scenting the air, and the golden light dying on the waters; another arm clasping her; another voice saying 'I love you, Bride.' Then the buttercup-meadow; and the shrubbery seat at the end of the old garden; and the great grey tower of the castle in the waning sunshine—all these images went drifting by, as if the swift current of her life was carrying them fast out to sea!

'Will you give yourself to me?' repeated the voice at her side.

'Yes.'

Did some one else speak the word, or did it fall from her own lips? That noble, knightly face was close to hers; rank, wealth, the love of a good man—all these

treasures were within her grasp, and yet she held them with a languid hold.

'We shall be very happy, love,' he said confidently.

They would be very happy; yes. Bride would realize it all, later on, when she was alone, and could look her good fortune steadily in the face. And then there was a rustling of skirts outside the door, and Lady Emily returned to her post.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### 'TIS WISER TO FORGET.'

THE brightest spring sunlight was shining on the long string of carriages and well-groomed horses that blocked up New Bond Street; a good deal of fashionable life was sweeping up the carpeted steps of the Grosvenor Gallery, and accepting neat little grey catalogues at the entrance; and Bride, with Lord Inglefield and Lady Emily in close attendance, was much amused with the show.

A sucking poet that day compared Miss Netterville to a rich white rose of summer, set in autumn foliage. He wrote a sonnet about her, and got it printed in a magazine which 'took' æsthetic poetry. The simple truth was that Bride wore a satin gown, of that peculiar shade which our grandmothers used to call 'dead-leaf;' a colour that toned well with her creamy fairness and bright hair. She was too fully occupied with the crowd to care much at first for looking at the pictures. And what a crowd it was!

It was easy, at the first glance, to see that Beauty was in great force in this throng; and yet the guise in which she had pranked herself out was often passing strange. Maidens with pale chiselled features and sunken eyes wore masses of auburn hair trailing over their sad-coloured gowns; square-cut bodices, puffed sleeves,

and jonquils showing a great deal of stalk, were seen on every side. All the heroines of a certain great poet seemed to have assembled here; the Blessed Damosel, tall and willowy, had come back, with her yearning gaze, to earth; and the wan face of 'sad Rose Mary' was framed in dark tresses—

'As the moon lies in the lap of night.'

They were almost all melancholy beauties, whose smiles were faint and rare, and whose eyes perchance had watched 'the wind hunting for the primrose-seed' until they were somewhat lustreless and weary.

There were plenty of other faces as well worth looking at as the beauties: faces of thoughtful men, always digging in the heaviest literary soil; of keen-eyed, genial men who did the leaders in the great 'dailies;' of novelists of both sexes, watching the world with quietly observing eyes;

of artists, mostly bronzed, cheery, and gay; of an actor or two; of numerous distinguished amateurs in every branch of art. These, with other faces that belonged to the purely fashionable sphere, came floating and drifting about Bride, who was herself a point of attraction.

Lord Inglefield knew everybody, and was known of everybody. The crowd was dense; their progress through the rooms was slow; and Lady Emily, although well used to crushes, was feeling as intensely bored as she had ever been in the whole course of her hard-working life. Still, she kept up her bland smile, and sustained herself with thoughts of a half-hour doze that might be snatched between afternoon tea and dinner. And then, too, all her anxiety was over; the fortress had surrendered without even a show of defence. Bride had whispered something into her ear on

Sunday night, and had been rewarded with a calm kiss and fervent blessing.

Suddenly, among all these strange faces, Miss Netterville met the gaze of a pair of familiar eyes, and felt her heart throb at the recognition.

The last time she had seen those grey eyes, they had looked at her from the window of a second-class railway-carriage. She remembered the farewell glimpse of the departing train, and then the solitary walk homeward along the leaf-strewn road in the quiet of the early morning.

Scarcely six months had gone by since that parting on an autumn day, and now the girls were meeting again in this great crowd, changed beings both.

For just one instant Bride almost fancied that she had been deceived by a chance resemblance; the change in Eunice Swift was so striking and inexplicable that it

seemed as if a miracle must have been wrought. She had always thought Eunice plain, although it was a plainness which George Eliot would have called 'of a good human sort;' and the irregularity of feature was still noticeable, but it was softened and tempered in a wonderful way. The complexion had grown clearer, and there was a general look of health and prosperity; but the most startling thing of all was the transformation of the down-trodden little teacher into a charming woman of the world.

There was a touch of the Frenchwoman in Eunice. She had a happy tact and grace of manner which set everybody around her at ease. There was something French, too, about her dress, and in her mode of wearing it. Her colours were always rightly chosen; there was perfect harmony between her bonnet and gown. She was gloved and

shod to perfection. You found her pleasant to look upon, although you saw at a glance that she had not the slightest pretension to beauty.

At the sight of Bride a sudden light broke over her face. She came up at once, quiet and self-possessed, yet showing her delight in lips and eyes.

'At last,' she said. 'I've been wondering if I should catch a glimpse of you this season!'

People always listened when she spoke. The voice, low and musical, won approval from Lady Emily at once.

It was fortunate for the friends that they had chanced to meet near a corner where no attractive picture was to be seen. Bride spoke a few rapid words to Lord Inglefield, and then drew Eunice into this little nook. Lady Emily, discovering a chair at the same moment, pounced down on it like a hawk

dropping on its prey, and secured a blissful interval of repose.

'Eunice,' said Bride, surveying her critically, 'you are beautifully dressed, and delightfully altered altogether. What have you been doing to yourself? Your eyes are the only bits of you that are not changed.'

'I'm glad that something familiar is left,' Eunice answered blithely. 'I was quite fond enough of my poor old self to wish to retain some tokens of her! And you, Bride—you are more than ever like a princess out of a fairy-tale! Your new life suits you well.'

'And yet I sometimes feel a faint pang of regret for the old,' said Bride.

To no other woman would she have made such an admission.

Eunice's eyes sought Lord Inglefield, who stood chatting to an acquaintance, and then her glance came back to Bride.

'Has the princess found her prince?' she whispered.

'Yes,' Bride murmured, with half a sigh.

'He is worthy even of you,' Eunice said warmly. 'Don't encourage those regrets for a dead past, dearest Bride; no woman should hang over the faint scent of *pot pourri*, while she may breathe the rich fragrance of living flowers. After all, there is a fictitious charm in remembrance.'

'I believe mine is an unthankful nature,' Bride replied. 'I do not want to part with any of my new treasures, and yet I don't value them as I ought. There is something cold in me, Eunice—something unresponsive and apathetic. I want to be kindled into a glow!'

'Everything is new yet,' said her friend hopefully. 'They say that the fire that kindles slowly burns longest.'

The blue eyes, wistfully seeking that kind

clever face, seemed to brighten a little at those words.

'There is hope for me in that saying, Eunice. Oh, there are a thousand things I want to say to you! Let us meet often, and talk over the old time and the old life.'

'No,' said Eunice, shaking her head; 'there must be no revival of Seacastle memories. Lady Inglefield must live in the present and the future; her hands are full of fresh duties and joys. As for me, dear, I'm a hard-working author, who utilizes her own emotions and everyone else's. We have little leisure, you see, for treading old paths.'

'Ah, you are so busy—so happy! By-and-by I shall find myself envying your laurels.'

'What does a woman want with laurels when she wears her myrtle crown?' Eunice asked, smiling. 'You are "half-angered

with your happy lot;" but the mood will soon pass. Go and look at the picture of "Rare pale Margaret," and behold a portrait of yourself:

> '"Your sorrow, only sorrow's shade,
> Keeps real sorrow far away."'

And with a hand-pressure, and a loving look which Bride perfectly understood, Eunice glided off to rejoin Mrs. Densley and Mr. Kennard, and was soon lost in the crowd.

A little later there was a tap at the door of Angeline Torwood's schoolroom, and Miss Swift presented herself, to ask for a cup of tea with the children. She was hailed with vociferous delight by the two little Allansons, and a smile of welcome from Angeline; but there was something grave in the smile. Miss Torwood, usually so sunny in her manner, was almost *distrait* to-day, and listened to her friend's vivacious

talk with feeble interest. Even a vivid description of the costumes worn at the Grosvenor Gallery failed to win her full attention; and she was only moved to languid laughter by Eunice's æsthetic antics and poses.

The children, immensely delighted, applauded with all their might, and lingered over their tea until Angeline gently reminded them that their mother would expect them downstairs. It was their custom to spend an hour with Mrs. Allanson between five and six in the evening; but they departed with little howls of reluctance, imploring Miss Swift not to go till they came back.

When the door had closed upon them Eunice's gaiety instantly subsided.

'What is the matter, Angeline?' she asked, gravely and anxiously.

'Oh!' said Angeline, with a nervous movement of her hands, 'I have had a shock

to-day! Dr. Allanson has heard strange news!'

'Anything about your brother?' said Eunice faintly.

'No—no; but if the rumour is true he will be a terrible loser. It is said that Miss Paisley is married!'

'Miss Paisley married? It must be a mistake, Angeline; a dying woman would not think of marriage!'

'Dr. Allanson says she always does think of it—up to her last moment!' replied Angeline, with a shadowy smile; 'and I'm afraid he believes that Aunt Virginia has been only playing at dying.'

'An awful game to play at,' Eunice said. 'No doubt she had a morbid craving for something dramatic, and felt herself fitted for the *rôle* of the departing saint. I dare say she got to believe in the reality of the situation at last.'

'She must have been a determined hypocrite,' cried Angeline, with unwonted bitterness. 'To lie on her couch, and talk sweetly to Lawrence of her approaching end, until the poor fellow almost thought he saw a nimbus round her head!'

'Now I really don't think Captain Torwood's imagination ever went so far as that,' said Eunice, laughing outright. 'But aren't you exciting yourself about nothing? You are not sure that the story is true.'

'I could see that Dr. Allanson thought it true.'

'Well, if it is, we will hope that there won't be any change in your brother's prospects. Why not look on the bright side of the matter?'

'Eunice, there is no bright side. Dr. Allanson has heard that the bridegroom is a sort of handsome adventurer, who has got Aunt Virginia completely into his power.'

Eunice's countenance fell.

'There can be nothing more wretched than the expectation of a fortune,' Angeline went on, sadly. 'Hundreds of times I've wished that my dear boy had been ignorant of Miss Paisley's intentions. He has gone on for years, behaving as if he were a rich man; and on the strength of his supposed wealth he proposed to Celia. Literally, he has been living and acting on an idea. However, I am thankful now that his marriage has been delayed.'

'Why was it delayed?' Eunice asked.

'Celia made little difficulties, and I don't think Lawrence put forth his full powers of persuasion. He told me once that Aunt Virginia said he was a dawdler. He *has* dawdled over his courtship, I do believe.'

Eunice sat silent, with a strange joy stirring in her heart. What did it matter

to her whether he married Celia Devereux or not?

And then, almost abruptly, she got up, kissed Angeline, and took her departure.

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